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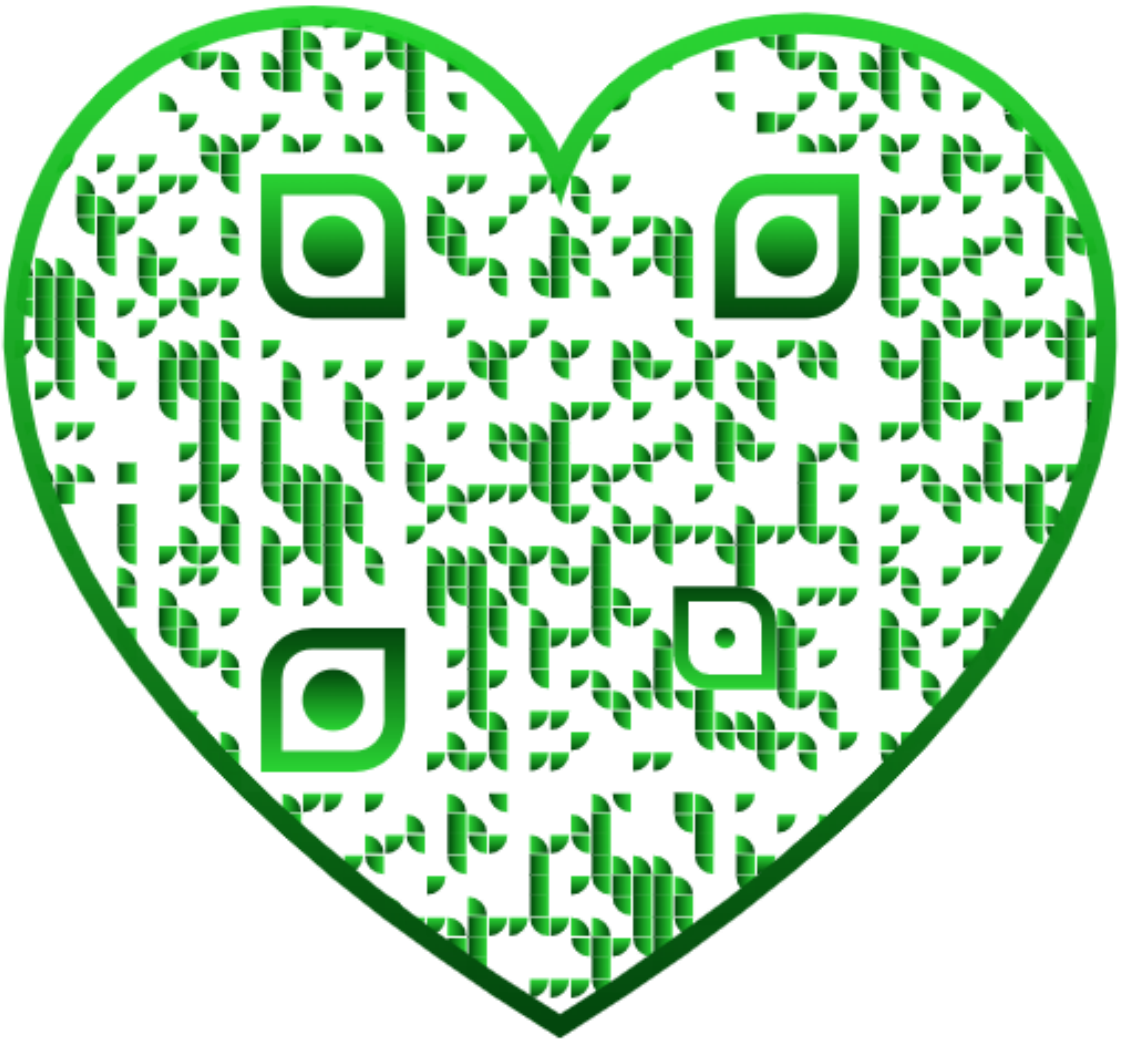

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10. Virtually zero failure rate

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Insert: Laurens Van Houten / Frank White Photo Agency

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How Mark 'Bedders' Bedford's forthright fingerstyle keeps the ska legends' foundations sturdy

Gibson Goes Nocturnal

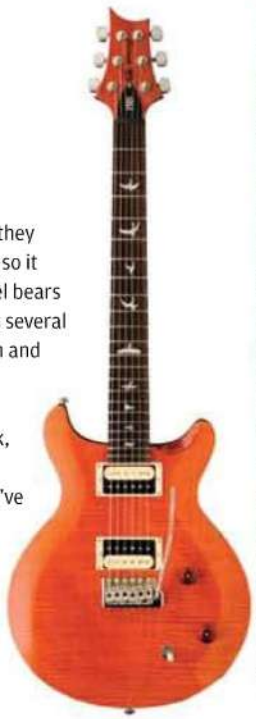
With a very limited shipment reaching our shores soon, Gibson's £1999 Nighthawk Standard 2010 is a rare animal. Coming over like the racier younger brother of the Les Paul with blues-town-inspired nitro finish options (St Louis Sauce, Memphis Mojo, Chicago Blue), it's a seductive number. The AA quilted maple top and chambered body with single Florentine cutaway complete the look admirably. The pickups measure up nicely, too: two Burstbuckers sandwich a neat blade single coil, with added versatility provided by a push/pull volume, tone controls that split the humbuckers and a five-way switch. It's got a blues-friendly rosewood fingerboard with 22 medium jumbo frets, and the long 25.5" scale length opens up tonal frontiers ripe for exploration. Lastly, Kluson tulip-button pearloid tuners finish off a tempting prospect for Gibson lovers everywhere. The price: £1099.

Also fresh from Gibson USA is the Lou Pallo Signature. Pallo, 'the man of a million inversions', was a member of the Les Paul Trio, and his alluring new model is released in honour of his friendship with the legendary guitar icon. Half LP Custom, half LP Standard, it's got a dashing ebony finish with natural back and sides, carved maple top and a 'Lou Pallo' signature 12th fret inlay. The pickups provide a nice range of tone too, with a P90 at the neck and Gibson's Dirty Fingers humbucker at the bridge. Sadly, they're only releasing 400 worldwide, so if you want one... apply now. See www.gibson.com.

Godin's Trio

Among the new Godins set to make their debut at NAMM are the Richmond Empire, the Icon Series and the MultiOud. The retro Empire (above left) is billed as packing a 'one-two punch' and it promises fine tone at a pleasing price. It has a single-cutaway silver leaf maple body with poplar wings (or you can choose solid mahogany), and should fit a multitude of tastes. The Icon Series (centre) is made up of four models: the Type 2 Fat Black, Classic and Convertible and the Type 3. All three have chambered solid mahogany bodies with carved tops, Graphtech Resomax bridges and Godin's High-Definition Revoicer system. A choice of pickups are available depending on the model, including Duncan P-Rails and 59s, Lollar P90s and Godin's Custom Humbuckers. Finally, the rather strange MultiOud; based on a Middle Eastern 11-string instrument, it opens up the live arena to oud players without feedback or tuning issues. From £1159; see www.godinguitars.com.

Santana's Guitar Heaven

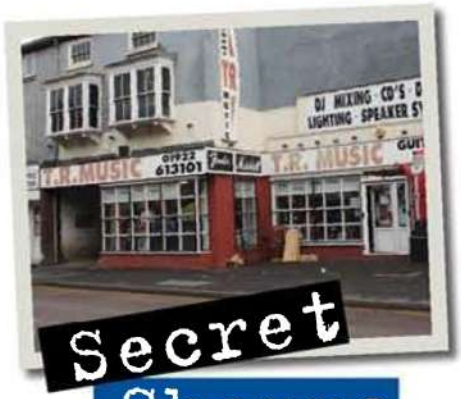


Paul Reed Smith had Santana in mind when they first designed the SE series nine years ago, so it comes as no surprise that the new SE model bears the multi-talented guitarist's name. It also marks several firsts for the series, including a 24.5" scale length and the trademark shaping of Santana's other PRS signatures. The body is mahogany with a maple top and a vibrant flamed finish (available in black, orange or yellow) and the Wide Fat neck has a rosewood fingerboard. Sticking to tradition, they've plumped for trusty 'old school' bird inlays and then added pickups designed especially for Santana by PRS. Other features include a volume, a tone, a three-way toggle and a PRS vibrato. RRP is £749; for all the specs and more info visit www.prsguitars.com.

Blackstar Line

Having proved themselves to be amongst the UK's best, Blackstar amps continue their ascent with the addition of some neat new models to their award-winning Series One range. Set for release at this year's Winter NAMM are three new heads: the 50W S1-50 with two channels and four modes (Warm, Bright/Crunch and Super Crunch) and two S1-104 100W four-channel valve heads – the EL34, based on their S1-200 model, and the 6LS, a metal-friendly high-gain monster. Cabwise, there's the S1-212 2x12 with custom Celestion Neo 12" speakers and the '1960' size S1-4112PRO, built for a solid midrange and fitted with specially-designed Celestion Vintage 30 speakers. See all the specs at www.blackstaramps.co.uk.

www.downmagaz.com



Secret Shoppa

VISITING A GUITAR SHOP NEAR YOU!

T.R. MUSIC, WALSALL

Supermarket trolleys wouldn't go amiss at the entrance of T.R. Music, Walsall, Birmingham. This huge premises is crammed with modern and vintage gear and row upon row of bargain bins offering some excellent deals. 'We've been here over 30 years,' says owner Mike Tolley. 'We are ideally situated a few miles from the M6, with a great local clientele and passing trade.'

LAYOUT: T.R. Music is a large shop, to say the least. Level two has a very impressive lighting, DJ and PA department, while downstairs is totally dedicated to rock'n'roll. The atmosphere is excellent, with old school rockers mixing with younger players and freely discussing tall on-the-road tales or trying out guitars

RANGE OF NEW GEAR: You'll find a cool selection of hand-picked acoustic electrics, basses and amps from Yamaha, Eko, Martin, Crafter, Tanglewood, Fender, Ernie Ball, Sheridan, Hofner, Squier, Fernandes, Schecter, Washburn, Cort, Markbass and Ashton

SECONDHAND GEAR: T.R. Music excels in secondhand equipment and has a fab collection of vintage and modern clobber laid out for browsing. 'Some of the old vintage equipment doesn't get a chance to go in the window – it's in and out really quickly,' says Mike. 'We have some fine examples here at the moment. This original '75 Orange OR120 head sounds wonderful through this old Sound City 4x12" cab, and at the moment we have several Marshall heads, cabs and combos.'

BEST BARGAIN IN THE SHOP: We spotted some cool deals on both old and modern products, including a semi-acoustic Hofner J5F jazzer at £350 and a Line 6 Flextone II combo at £199... and a host of goodies in those bargain buckets

HIGHLIGHT: There's a bigger-than-average repair shop at T.R. Music which is equipped to take on just about every guitar and amp problem. They also offer neat little enticements, such as free fitting of any pickups purchased in the shop. With a good selection of quality PA systems, T.R. Music often hire out for various local events, and they support local schools and colleges

CONCLUSION: Nothing was too much trouble for the staff, and we were assured that the great atmosphere during our rainy day visit was quite normal. Great coffee and biscuits, too

VITAL STATISTICS

Layout	19/20
Staff knowledge	19/20
Staff helpfulness	19/20
Range of new gear	16/20
Range of secondhand gear	18/20
Parking	street parking opposite
TOTAL	91%

CONTACT: 01922 613101
233-236 Stafford Street, Walsall, WS2 8DF
WEB: www.trmusic.co.uk

In Brief

Uriah Heep At Butlins

Prog-rockers Uriah Heep are booked to headline the Great British Rock & Blues Festival this year at Butlins, Skegness. The festival takes place on January 28-30 and is set to be a stormer, with performances from Monsters Of British Rock (with Whitesnake's Micky Moody and Neil Murray, Laurie Wisefield of Wishbone Ash and Harry James from Thunder). Other acts include Sandi Thom and Dr Feelgood. Tickets cost £65 (weekend inc. accommodation). Call 0845 070 4750

Solo Mission

Many guitarists hit a brick wall when it comes to advancing their soloing chops; after all, the names of the modes – Aeolian, Mixolydian, Phrygian – hardly sound friendly. Good job that help has arrived in the form of *Guitar Solo Basics*, a DVD which helps to break down the secrets to let you finally take charge of your fretboard. The course consists of eight DVDs from tuning your axe to mastering the modes, a handy manual and more. See www.guitarsolobasics.com for details

Guitar Center Online

Interesting news for those struggling to find what they're looking for in the UK; the massive American guitar retailer Guitar Center has just set up an online store selling their wares to over 90 countries worldwide. Guitar Center is officially the world's largest seller of guitars, amps, pro audio and recording gear, so they've got a lot of stuff. See www.guitarcenter.com

Show Tickets Up For Grabs

Guitar Shows Birmingham
www.ukguitarshows.co.uk

After the sweet success of their Bristol event, UK Guitar Shows is heading to Birmingham on 26-27 February for their next foray into guitar world. Enthusiasts will be heading along to the New Bingley Hall in Birmingham's city centre to experience a vast array of exhibitors including Gibson, Marshall, PRS, Peavey, Orange, Ibanez, Laney, Vigier, Diezel, Patrick Eggle, JJ Guitars and Rotosound. It's well worth keeping your schedule free, but here's an extra incentive – thanks to the generosity of the show's organisers, 10 lucky *G&B* readers (and a friend) will be getting in for free. For a chance to win a pair of day-passes that'll get you and one other into the show on Saturday or Sunday, simply answer this Brum-related question...

What is the name of Black Sabbath's guitar player?

Answers on a postcard to: *Guitar Show Birmingham*, Guitar & Bass, Anthem Publishing, Office 6B, Rathbone Square, Tanfield Rd, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 1BT. Closing date for entries: 7 Feb 2011. Usual rules apply.

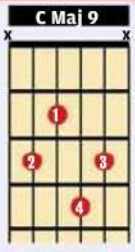
More show info at **www.ukguitarshows.com; tickets £8**

Smash Hit

Here's a pocket-sized amplifier that won't break the bank... or your back. Diago made its name with some hard-wearing pedalboards and matching Powerstation power supplies, and now they've branched out with a very smart new offering. The Little Smasher is a 5W portable guitar amp with four analogue-modelled gain stages that will fit snugly onto your pedalboard, offering a transport-friendly alternative to lugging an amp around. It has Gain and Volume controls and a two-band active EQ controlling treble and bass and is compatible with any cab with impedance from 4 to 16 Ohms; the carbon steel casing means it's hard as nails, and powering comes via the industry standard 9V adaptor. RRP will be £129; for more details see www.diago.co.uk.

The Lost Chord

Here's a sweet voicing of Cmaj9 consisting of root, major third, major seventh and major ninth. Ensure your fingertips are kept upright in order to avoid damping any strings. Since there are no open strings, it can be moved up and down the fretboard at will.



Woke Up This Mornin'...

Treasured Possessions

Del and his Strat. Scalloped frets, short backplate and chunky frets point towards one man – Ritchie Blackmore

Photos: Mike Prior

A return to the stage has led a guitarist to reappraise the significance of an ex-rock god Fender that he toted so casually in his formative years

Del Bartle

On How The Godfathers Rock To

A Blackmore Strat

'I'm not claiming to be Satriani or anything like that,' muses Del Bartle, 'but I do like to make a big noise!' Now he's back playing with old muckers Peter and Chris Coyne of cult favourites the Godfathers, he's getting regular opportunities to do exactly that.

The roots of the Godfathers lie with the Sid Presley Experience, a dangerous, suited-and-booted group of mod agitators who thrilled audiences of the early 1980s. The Presley camp was a volatile one, though, and a split was always on the cards. The Coyne brothers relaunched as the Godfathers, signing with Epic records, while Bartle and drummer Kevin Murphy found less favour with their new outfit the Unholy Trinity.

After a couple of decades pursuing other interests, Del is now back – stepping in, single-handed, for Godfathers guitar men Kris Dollimore and Mike Gibson. It's no problem: Bartle has always been comfortable covering both rhythm and lead duties. It's basically the old Sid Presley line-up with a new drummer, Grant Nicholas, and relations are now so harmonious that we can expect new material very soon.

Bartle was heavily influenced by punk and '60s beat combos, so it comes as a surprise to hear that his sound was forged on a Strat customised for '70s rock god Ritchie Blackmore. A friend had bought the guitar in 1974 in a shop in Shepherds Bush. He knew of its previous owner, but happily sold it to Del four years later to finance the purchase of a Les Paul.

'I paid £220 for it,' laughs Del. 'You can probably put at least a nought on that. Back in the '70s I don't think the vintage or the ex-artist thing meant much, really. I'd always liked Strats because I was a massive Hendrix fan. The scalloped fretboard was just an oddity, and the fact that it was ex-Blackmore was just an aside.'

As Del has never had any intention of selling the Strat, he's never felt the need to prove its

'Back in the '70s I don't think the vintage or the ex-artist guitar thing meant much, really'

provenance. We do know that it's a late '68 or early '69 with the backplate cut down for easier string changing and wide frets.

'It was the only electric I had for years, so the neck must have been a big influence on my playing. It feels a bit weird when you first pick it up, but back then I never even thought about it. I've got a lot of guitars now, but this is still the only one with a scalloped fretboard.'

Recently, the Strat's potential value has made him nervous enough to buy a new US Strat for live duties. 'When I think of the squats we lived in and all the dingy gigs we played... there were so many opportunities for it to get nicked. It's only now, when it's probably much safer, that I've become a bit wary. I've had it 32 years, and it's been through a lot of scrapes. I'm amazed that it's survived - but I'm very glad it has.'

info

LATEST ALBUM: SHOT LIVE AT THE 100 CLUB

A storming live CD and DVD which captures Bartle ripping it up at the Godfathers' 25th Anniversary gig at the 100 Club

MORE INFO:

www.godfathershq.com

www.downmagaz.com

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8244	Fender Original 1973 USA Precision in Sunburst
8243	Fender Original 1969 USA Jazz in Sunburst
8297	Fender Geddy Lee Signature Jazz in Sunburst
8459	Fender 62 American Vintage Precision in Sunburst
7795	Fender Highway 1 USA Jazz in Wine Transparent
8690	Fender Standard Precision in Candy Apple Red
8145	Fender Standard Mexican Jazz in Blue
8721	Fender Standard Jazz in Sunburst
8071	Fender 70s Jazz in Black
8157	Duesenberg Starplayer in Trans Orange
8156	Duesenberg Starplayer in Black
7583	Warwick Corvette Standard 4 in Natural Oil
8716	Warwick Thumb 4 Bolt On in Natural
8741	Warwick Corvette $$ Ltd Edition 2010
8833	Warwick Pro Series Corvette in Natural
8623	MusicMan Stingray 3EQ in True Gold
8781	MusicMan Stingray 2EQ in Blue Pearl
8779	MusicMan Stingray 2EQ in Black
8780	MusicMan Stingray 2EQ in Candy Red
7573	Lakland 4402 in Sunburst
8022	Lakland Skyline Bob Glaub Sig in Sunburst
8023	Lakland 4401 in Black
7570	Lakland Darryl Jones Signature in Blue
6704	Yamaha BB714BS Billy Sheehan Signature
8448	Yamaha RBX374 in Metallic Red
3667	Westcoast BG2 in Natural or See Through Red
3669	Westcoast BG4 Neck Thru Body in Brown Stain
3668	Westcoast BG3 in Natural
3665	Westcoast MMB4 in Candy Apple Red or Blue
6461	Squier Vintage Modified Fretless Jazz Sunburst
8704	Squier Classic Vibe 60s Precision in Fiesta Red
8251	Squier James Johnston Sig Model Jazz in Blue
7680	Squier Vintage Modified 70s Jazz Bass in Natural
8583	Spector Euro LX4 in Natural
8019	Rockbass Fortress 4 in Blue
7623	Rockbass Streamer Standard In Blue Stain
5873	Peavey Cirrus Series, BXP, Redwood, Bolt-On
5527	Levin LB400 in Blue
2701	Levin LB100J in Trans Red
2702	Levin LB200 in Cherry Sunburst
559	Levin LB400 in Red
8258	Levin LB100J in Antique Sunburst
8724	Levin LB100P in Black
7912	FleaBass Wild One Junior in Black
8264	FleaBass Model 32 Pro Punk in Green
7911	FleaBass Pro Water In Blue
8128	Epiphone Thunderbird IV in Vintage Sunburst
8129	Epiphone Viola in Vintage Sunburst
8065	Epiphone Thunderbird Pro IV in Black
8261	Dean Jeff Berlin Signature in Brazilia Burst
8273	Bass Collection Jive Bass in Purple Haze
5721	Bass Collection SP4 in Natural Yellow

5 String Bass Guitars In Stock

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8574	Marleaux Consat Straight 5 in Bordeaux
6526	Marleaux M Bass Custom 5 in Maple & Walnut
8711	Marleaux Consat Custom 5 in Natural Satin
6951	Marleaux Consat Custom 5 Fretless in Pearwood
8619	Overwater J-Series Deluxe in Black
8710	Overwater J Series Deluxe in Quilted Trans Red
7526	Overwater Perception Standard Deluxe in Koa
5497	Overwater Perception Standard Deluxe in Bubinga
8395	MusicMan Stingray 3EQ in Black Finish
8017	Peavey USA Cirrus in Natural
8015	Yamaha BBNEII Nathan East Sig in Black
5741	Yamaha BB615 in Yellow Natural Satin
8458	Yamaha BB415 in Red Burst
8354	Yamaha BB415 in Trans Orange
8506	Yamaha BB2005 in Natural
3664	Westcoast JB5 in sunburst and amber
5876	Warwick Streamer LX5 in Emerald Green
8728	Warwick Rockbass Corvette Basic Active in Black
8018	Rockbass Vampyre 5 in Black
8020	Rockbass Streamer LX5 in Black
8016	Peavey Cirrus in Natural
8262	MTD Kingston Heir in Trans Cherry
7571	Lakland 5501 in 3 Colour Sunburst
8608	Ibanez BTB475 in Royal Blue
8689	Fender Deluxe Jazz Bass in Burnt Orange
8015	Yamaha BBNEII Nathan East Sig in Black
3670	Westcoast BG5 Fretless in Natural

6 String Bass Guitar In Stock

6967	Overwater Perception Std Deluxe in Claro Walnut

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7384	Levin LAB150 in Black
7383	Levin LAB150 in Natural
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556	Levin LB100 in Sunburst
6871	Breedlove ABJ250/SM4
8621	Breedlove Atlas Series Stage BJ350/CR4

Bass Combos

7145	Mark Bass Mini CMD151P Combo (400w, 1x15)
7144	Mark Bass CMD121H Combo (400w, 1x12)
4820	Mark Bass Mini CMD121P Combo (400w, 1x12)
6587	Gallien Kruger 700RB 115 Combo (320w, 1x15)
6586	Gallien Kruger MB150S Combo (150w, 1x12)
8658	Gallien Kruger BL112 Combo (100w, 1x12)
8659	Gallien Kruger BL115 Combo (115w, 1x15)
8657	Gallien Kruger BL110 Combo (70w, 1x10)
8119	Ashdown 550 Touring Combo (550w, 2x10)
5114	Ashdown Klystron C115-500 Combo (575w, 1x15)
3627	Ashdown MAG C115-300 Evo2 Combo (300w, 1x15)
704	Ashdown ABM C115 500 Evo III (575w, 1x15)
6617	Ashdown After Eight Combo (15w, 1x8)
6618	Ashdown Perfect Ten Combo (30w, 1x10)
6619	Ashdown Five Fifteen Combo (100w, 1x15)
8114	Ashdown AL D600 C210 Combo (575w, 2x10)
3614	Ashdown ABM C210T-500 Evo3 Combo (575w, 2x10)
3629	Ashdown MAG C410T-300 Evo2 Combo (300w, 4x10)
6581	Ashdown AL MK500 Bass Combo (575w, 2x10)
6616	Ashdown EB180 15 Evo2 Combo (180w, 1x15)
8122	Ashdown 515 Mini Stack (100w, 2x10)
6615	Ashdown EB180 12 Evo2 Combo (180w, 1x12)
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8638	Fender Rumble 75 Combo (75w, 1x12)
7772	Orange Crush PiX 50BXT Combo (50w, 1x12)
7773	Orange Crush PiX 100BXT Combo (100w, 1x15)
650	Marshall MB150 Combo (150w, 1x15)
6629	Marshall MB4410 Combo (450 Watt, 4x10)
7259	Marshall MB4210 Combo (450w, 2x10)
6733	AER Amp One Combo (200w, 1x10)
8362	AER Amp Two Combo (240w, 1x12)
6598	Roland Microcube Bass RX Combo (4x4)

Bass Heads

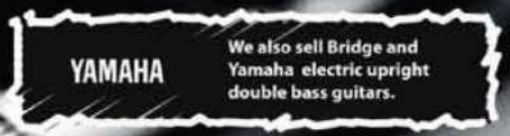
7495	Orange Terror Bass 500 Head (500w)
7579	Warwick Sonic II Head (200w)
7920	TC Electronic RH450 Head (450w)
7921	TC Electronic Classic 450 Head (450w)
5862	Peavey Tour VB2 Tube Head (225w)
5860	Peavey Tour 450 Head (450w)
5868	Peavey Pro VB3 Tube Head (300w)
4656	Orange AD200B MK3 Tube Head (200w)
7258	Marshall 1992LEM Tube Head (100w)
2752	Marshall VBA400 Tube Head (400w)
4814	Mark Bass SD800 Digital Head (750w)
7759	Mark Bass SD1200 Digital Head (1200w)
6605	Mark Bass F1 Head (500w)
6603	Mark Bass TA501 Head (500w)
4812	Mark Bass SA450 Bass Head (500w)
7758	Mark Bass Little Mark Tube Head (800w)
7756	Mark Bass Little Mark Tube Head (500w)
4813	Mark Bass Little Mark II Head (500w)
6604	Mark Bass Little Mark 250 Head (250w)
7137	Mark Bass TA503 Head (500w)
6602	Mark Bass LMK Bass Head (500w)
7755	Mark Bass Little Mark III Head (500w)
7068	Line6 LowDown HD750 Head (750w)
6584	Gallien Kruger BL600 Head (300w)
8584	Gallien Kruger MB2 Head (500w)
8822	Gallien Kruger Goldline 500 Head (500w)
3626	Ashdown MAG300H Evo2 Head (300w)
695	Ashdown ABM 900 EVO III Head (2x575w)
8116	Ashdown 427 Small Block Head (427w)
8117	Ashdown BTA300 Head (300w)
8471	Ashdown Little Bastard 30 Head (30w)
8644	Ashdown Gold Plate 30th Anni Mark King
5123	Ashdown AL MK500 Head (575w)
8120	Ashdown 550 Spyder Head (550w)
7536	Ashdown BTA400 Bass Head (400w)
8118	Ashdown BTA200 Bass Head (200w)
4739	Ashdown ABM500RC Evo III Head (575w)
6611	Ashdown Little Giant 350 Head (350w)
696	Ashdown ABM500 EVO III Head (575w)

Bass Cabinets

7923	TC Electronic RS212 Cab (2x12)
7922	TC Electronic RS210 Cab (2x10)
7924	TC Electronic RS410 Cab (4x10)
668	Peavey 410TVX Cab (4x10)
5865	Peavey Tour 410 Cab (4x10)
674	Peavey PRO210 Cab (2x10)
8712	Peavey PRO410 Cab (4x10)
5866	Peavey Tour 215 Cab (2x15)
7764	Orange SP212 Cab (2x12)
7763	Orange SP210 Cab (2x10)
7765	Orange SP410 Cab (4x10)
7761	Orange OBC810 Cab (8x10)
4658	Orange OBC115 Cab (1x15)
4657	Orange OBC410H Cab (4x10)
6637	Marshall MBC115 Cab (1x15)
6638	Marshall MBC410 Cab (4x10)
2753	Marshall VBC810 Cab (8x10)
652	Marshall VBC412 Cab (4x12)
6639	Marshall MBC810 Cab (8x10)
7267	Mark Bass Classic 152 Cab (2x15)
4819	Mark Bass STD106HF Cab (6x10)
7140	Mark Bass STD152HR Cab (2x15)
4816	Mark Bass STD104HF Cab (4x10)
7142	Mark Bass STD104HR Cab (4x10)
4818	Mark Bass STD102HF Cab (2x10)
7265	Mark Bass NY804 Cab (4x8)
7141	Mark Bass STD151HR Cab (1x15)
8647	Mark Bass New York 804 Cab (4x8)
7266	Mark Bass NY121 Cab (1x12)
6607	Mark Bass Traveler Series
7432	Line6 LowDown 410 Cab (4x10)
6585	Gallien Kruger 410BLX Cab (4x10)
6608	Ashdown NEO 2104H Compact Cab (2x10)
3615	Ashdown ABM210T Evo3 Cab (2x12)
3620	Ashdown ABM410T Cab (4x10)
3619	Ashdown ABM115 Cab (1x15)
8577	Ashdown LB212 Cab (2x12)
6599	Ashdown ABM810 Cab (8x10)
4737	Ashdown Mag 810 Deep Cab (8x10)
3632	Ashdown MAG410T Deep Cab (4x10)
3630	Ashdown MAG115 Deep Cab (1x15)
8032	Ashdown USA 115 Large Cab (1x15)
8124	Ashdown LB 212 Cab (2x12)
5118	Ashdown NEO 115H Comp Cab (1x15)
8033	Ashdown USA 410H Cab (4x10)
8034	Ashdown USA 414H Cab (4x10)
8035	Ashdown USA 610 Cab (6x10)
8036	Ashdown USA 810 Cab (8x10)
5117	Ashdown Klystron NEO 210 Cab (2x10)

Electric Upright Double Basses

8043	NS Design NXT 4 String
5250	NS Design CR4 4 String Bass
5251	NS Design WAV Series 4 String



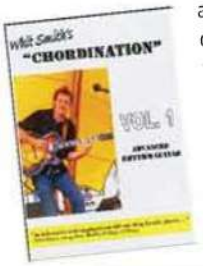
Bass Effects

4524	Tascam CDBT2 (Bass Phrase Trainer)
6777	Tascam MPBT1
3326	Roland VBASS Bass Processor
5671	Line6 Bass Floor POD
5672	Line6 Bass PODxt Live
4323	Electro Harmonix Bassballs USA
8478	Digitech BP80 Bass Mulit-Effects
4374	Boss ME50B Bass Multi-Effects
3193	Boss GT6B Bass Multi Effects
5797	Boss GE87 Bass EQ
6939	Boss GK3B Synth Driver Pickup For Bass
6556	Boss GT10B Bass Mulit-Effects
5284	Boss CEB3 Bass Chorus Pedal
5282	Boss LMB3 Bass Limiter Enhancer
5794	Boss ODB3 Bass Overdrive
5804	Ashdown DRIVE (Overdrive Plus)
5807	Ashdown Envelope Filter
5806	Ashdown Chorus Plus

Hot Club Of Cowtown

Whit Smith introduces us to the music that turned him from rock'n'roller into a cool, jazzy, Western swing rebel

If a blend of Django Reinhardt's gypsy jazz and the downhome Western swing of Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys tickles your fancy, the Hot Club Of Cowtown have absolutely got it nailed. Whit Smith rattles off impossibly complex chord patterns and leadlines on his 1946 Gibson L-5, backed by Elana James on violin and Jake Erwin on double bass, and the latest album *What Makes Bob Holler* sees them whip up a storm, reworking Bob Wills' finest moments with no overdubs and the minimum of takes to recreate the atmosphere of those classic recordings. Whit is truly a modern master of this style of guitar, and if you think your fingers are up to the task, his *Chordination* tuition DVD can show you just how it's done.



This was the catalyst, a real turning point for me...

Speedy West & Jimmy Bryant

Stratosphere Boogie: The Flaming Guitars Of...

Bryant was the original Telecaster man. He flew by the seat of his pants, full of energy with just a bit of distortion, so it appealed to me as a rock'n'roll man. He's attacking the guitar, knocking the door down with it, but he's not just grabbing one note, shaking it all day and making a face... it's fast, but sophisticated.

Leon Rhodes was the master – no one could touch him...

The Texas Troubadours

Almost To Tulsa

Ernest Tubb was a country singer who had a backing band called the Texas Troubadours, and they made their own brilliant instrumental records. Buddy Charleton and Buddy Emmons were the steel players, and Leon Rhodes would tear it up on guitar – *Honey Fingers* is a finger twisting tune of godlike proportions. If you don't like *Rhodesbud Boogie* or *ET Boogie* you won't like any of it.

A band with two major artists that everyone should hear...

Bob Wills And His Texas Playboys

The Tiffany Transcriptions

Eldon Shamblin brought a sophisticated jazz aspect to Western music. A real pioneer: Leo Fender designed the Strat for him, and Charlie Christian was a fan. Alongside Eldon was Tiny Moore, and it was years before I realised Tiny was playing electric mandolin, not guitar, but with single-course strings. He's another huge influence.

I love this album, it's just full of awesome songs...

Hank Garland & His Sugar Footers

Hank became quite an accomplished jazz musician and he played on a bunch of Elvis records, but this is from his earlier swing and country years. You can hear Django in there but there's also a hint of country guitar deity George Barnes. There's at least a dozen classic tracks – *Hank's Dream*, *Seventh And Union*, *Sugarfoot Rag*. The Gibson Byrdland was named after Hank and Billy Byrd.

Organic, distorted, '50s guitar music with attitude...

Jimmie Rivers & The Cherokees

Brisbane Bop

Rivers came from Oklahoma, and it's funny how some players retain so much of where they come from. He mixes up the swing and the country with real energy, and that should appeal to rock'n'roll fans. He played a monster of a guitar – a hollowbodied Gibson double-neck with four PAF pickups. His buddy Vance Terry went on to play steel with Bob Wills.

Exquisite tone and taste – the Cartier of guitar playing...

Country All Stars

Jazz From The Hills

There's a lot more to Chet Atkins than just the thumbpicking – he's so diverse! This band also features George Barnes at his out-of-this-world best on a couple of tracks. They've taken old popular songs like ragtime stuff and turned them into Western swing. You can always count on Chet to give you a hot riff or a tasty lick. He's like Babe Ruth, he hits it out of the park every time.

Play This Track From My Album...

Hot Club Of Cowtown

What Makes Bob Holler

My reputation is for revoicing and moving chords around, which is really like the Eldon Shamblin thing. *It's All Your Fault* is a good example, but it's all over this record. You can make a simple two-chord tune sound really ornate. I have a DVD, *Chordination*, if you'd like some help!

Packet OF SIX

Once upon a time, Adi Vines muses, strings came in sturdy individual envelopes marked with useful information such as 'E' and '.010'. Now, in the cause of anti-corrosion, anti-piracy and the planet's long-term health, that's all changed

I found myself indulging in an orgy of string changing yesterday, and once again I had reason to curse Ernie Ball's new packaging. I understand and sympathise with the reasons they have done it, as the change to this nasty foil packet was reputedly made in order to make copies harder to fake. It's difficult to believe that the counterfeit pirates have now squeezed the market dry in DVDs, watches and perfume and have now turned their attention to guitar strings, but this is apparently the case.

Ernie Ball has always been my brand of choice. You can trace my use all the way back to the day that Elite decided to stop manufacturing guitar strings (oh, and giving them away free), and I chose Ernie Ball because they had the same plastic wallet and paper envelope packaging combo that made string stock management a doddle. The utilitarian nature of it meant that you could buy single string replacements, slide them into their place in the pack and things were good as new. You could also make whole sets from singles, compile sets made from custom gauges, and consolidate all your spares of the same gauge into their own pack and file them accordingly. Those plastic wallets were great; their disappearance is a disaster for organisation and efficiency, and it's forcing me to look elsewhere.

So, of the major string manufacturers that I can think of off the top of my head, how do things look? D'Addario are a non-starter: all six strings are contained in a heat-sealed single plastic packet, so if you use just one, the rest stay behind getting tangled with their bare ends ready to pierce the fingertips of the unwary. Also, during a mid-set broken string change on a darkened stage, I don't want to be peering myopically at tiny coloured ball ends to identify the string I need... where are the foolproof paper packets? I find it very odd that someone at D'Addario considered this packaging a good idea.

Speaking of very odd, what the hell are they smoking over at Dean Markley? The 'Cyrogenic Activated' strings that allegedly 'realign and reorganise the strings' molecular structure into a more active configuration' have been joined by the Helix range that apparently contain a 'genetic string code, imbedded with essential life strands'. While no doubt there are solid metallurgical processes behind these claims, I find that kind of marketing gobbledegook intensely annoying and can't bring myself to associate myself with it, no matter how good the strings may be.

What the hell are they smoking over at Dean Markley? Their Helix strings contain a 'genetic string code, imbedded with essential life strands'

I'm also suspicious of strings that are by-products of larger companies, as I can't shake the idea that they are all made in the same factory by a third party and then branded as required, very much the same way that valves are. Having said that, Dunlop seems to have made a fairly successful entry into the string market. I've tried them and they're excellent, but they don't come in my beloved plastic envelope. Neither do Rotosounds, which is a shame as I'd love to fly the flag and bring my whole client list of British artists to sit around the feet of a great British company.

There are many smaller string companies out there; can any of them provide a strong, great-sounding string that is packaged in a way that will satisfy my need for convenience and tidiness? A company that also has a generous UK artist relations office? If so, please get in touch and rescue me from this misery.

Adi Vines has worked with Radiohead, the Sex Pistols, the Darkness, Razorlight and

Guitar

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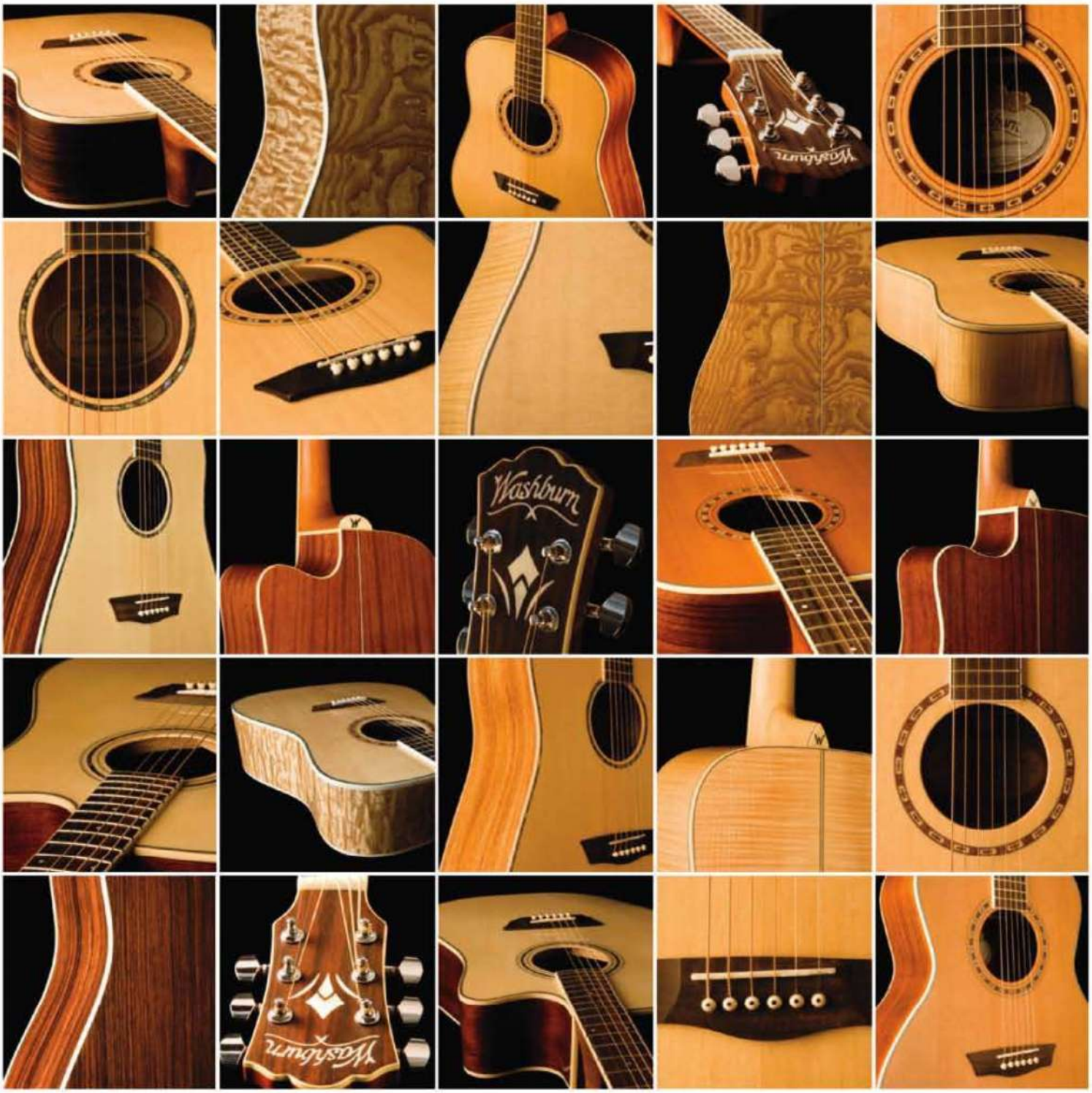
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Woke Up This Mornin'...

Reverberations

emails
letters
photos

Write to *Guitar & Bass*, Office 6B, Rathbone Square, Tanfield Road, Croydon, CRO 1BT or e-mail us: guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com
Please note, we reserve the right to edit where we feel it is appropriate, or to print extracts from longer correspondences

Star Letter

WORTHY OF A MENTION

I am a 43-year old guitarist, 30 of which have been spent playing in various pub bands, but just recently I encountered a situation which reminded me, unfavourably, of when I first started out. My favourite of all my guitars is a honeyburst Brian May Special – the creamiest, most versatile British-designed guitar I have ever played, yet for some reason I always leave it at home in favour of my Tele for gigs. I recently decided to take it to a pub jam night, and was approached by an older jazzer. 'You have to earn a guitar like that, boy,' he frowned, sneering at my best beloved as if it was something ejected from an elephant's bottom.

What? Where did this attitude hibernate for the past 30 years? Why is it that negative behaviour is still endemic of the older generation? The mystery was solved when the jazzer took to the mic and hacked out a series of flash minor diminished chords dedicated to his wife. Ah-hah! It isn't the older generation of guitarists that hold dear the mantle of faux-rockstar after all: it's just older players who, despite their advancing years, have been stuck in the same embittered rut of failure for the past half century. I'm so proud that younger players treat each other with a little more friendly respect than Mr Jazz probably ever did! Most older players with more enthusiasm for the guitar than for their own egos have always been approachable, friendly and willing to share both insight, technique and equipment.

I was annoyed by this incident, not so much for myself (I don't really care and will still take the BM next time), but what would have been the impact on someone of any age nervously attempting their first jam night?

Alan Helliwell
via email

PS. I once gave a plectrum to the great Gordon Giltrap, who smiled at it and said: 'Oh, how sweet!'

Good guitars: do players really have to earn them?

G&B: **Well done for standing your ground, Alan – and it's sad that you have to put up with such behaviour. We're all up for a bit of banter, but being snotty about whether someone's worthy of an instrument won't wash around these parts. No one on *G&B* had a top-of-the-line guitar when we were starting out, but there's no way we'd have turned one down, not even if we were still struggling with barré chords. So if anyone has any tales of guitar players of any age trying to belittle them, let us know. And Mr Giltrap is a fine human being; you'll never hear him make bitchy comments...**

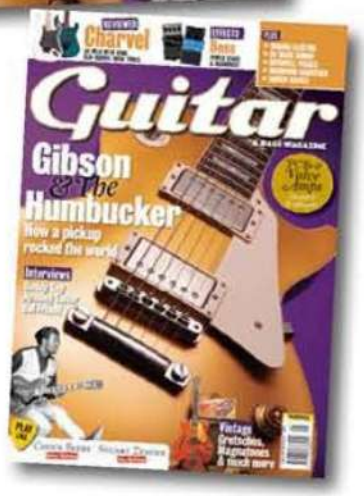
Written a Star Letter? Contact Aria on 0148 323 8720 to arrange delivery of your Fusion gig bag – electric, acoustic and bass models are all available!

FOR BUCK'S SAKE!

I tend not to buy guitar mags nowadays but your humbucker article (*G&B*, Jan 2011 issue) tempted me.

It was okay as far as it went. It could have gone much further, since there is an awful lot of information out there about Seth Lover's remit in designing the original 'patent applied for' humbucking pickup, but it seemed very much to me about promoting the views of the guys you called in to discuss the humbucker. Yes, Seymour Duncan can be praised for his efforts over the years in developing pickups of high quality, and although I've never used Bare Knuckle pickups, people who use 'em swear by 'em - but what about the quiet revolution in pickups heralded by people such as Iron Gear and Tonerider? My Iron Gear Blues Engine pickup astounded me with its clarity and its subtlety. This is the finest pickup I have used and its price is around a third of the ones usually advertised or reviewed in your pages.

I have a friend who is a guitar tech. He has an original Les Paul SG amongst many other fine instruments, but his pickup of choice is the Iron Gear Hot Slag and he fits many Iron Gear pickups to the guitars of pro musicians. These and Toneriders are within the price range of most musicians and many claim they are as good as the range of pickups you usually feature. The reason for their absence from the music press is obvious, of course, since word of mouth doesn't sell advertising, but it would be nice if once in a while you were to look at what real world guitarists are turning to.



Kevin Morris
via email

G&B: **First off, thanks for taking the time to read the article and give us your thoughts. You're right, there's an awful lot of info on this subject. The feature's author, Rik Flynn, enquired long and loud about getting more pages for it – and if ever a subject was worthy of a book, this was it. It was always going to be a big ask to include all the fine bespoke pickup makers. However, we're not going to be bored of**

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GUITAR GYM

NECK CORE STRENGTH LEVEL 3

Now we're ready for the big guns with this exercise. From the previous two issues, you will have been strengthening your deep neck flexors – but now you will be using these muscles in a completely different way. They're going to work as they lengthen (an eccentric contraction). Start by lying on your back and lift your head up off the floor towards your chest with your hands, keeping your chin tucked in. Maintain this position as you let go of your head with your hands, and keep your chin tucked in as you lower your head slowly to the floor. Lift your head up again with your hands, and repeat; it's really important to keep your chin tucked in to work the correct muscle group. Start with five of these exercises and build to 10 in a set, and one to two sets a day. This exercise is particularly useful for people with chronic neck pain or post-whiplash: if you are receiving treatment or the neck pain is quite recent, check with your physio to make sure you're able to do it correctly.

Got a health issue that affects your playing? Marion Turner is a physio specialising in musicians' injuries. Write to us, and we'll get her on to it

humbuckers any time soon, so we'll try and feature as many as possible in future issues.

RETAIL REPRIMAND

Armed with a list of possible purchases and a £200-ish budget, I headed for Charing Cross Road/Denmark Street to buy myself a half-decent combo to step up from my tiny Marshall. In the first shop, two guys welcomed me with huge smiles and listened to what I told them about my budget and list. Their reply? 'A lot of the information you have there is out of date, mate. But I know what you're after. Look, why don't I hook up a Strat to this Higginbottom & Baines Monster 40 and let you have a try? I reckon you'll be impressed. Or there's the Axemeister Blaster 50 – it's a little more expensive, but worth it.' Half an hour later, I'm heading home with the Blaster 50, thanking the guys for their help and advice.

What's wrong with this picture? It's a fairy tale, that's what wrong with it. The truth? Staff in three shops looked at me like I was a middle-aged idiot and basically told me to 'try next door' after spouting opinions on the whole 'valve amps vs modelling amps' debate, but not offering to demonstrate anything.

I can't think of any other retail sector where potential customers are treated so off-handedly. It was the same a couple of years ago when I was buying the beloved guitar itself.

So, well done to the guy in the fourth shop who showed an interest in me as I was studying the new Vox VT40+. He may well have spun me a salesman's line or two, but he made a sale. I don't know if I've made the right choice according to the 'cognoscenti' but it's brand new, it's got some terrific sounds in it – and I like it!

Stuart Mitchell
Bradford

G&B: **Stuart, we're delighted you're delighted with your purchase. If you like it, who else is there to please? Although we've heard many stories of 'above-and-beyond' service, your tale is sadly familiar. In a climate where brick-and-mortar shops are finding things tough we're baffled by this kind of behaviour. The shop you bought your Vox from should know their service is paying off, though, as they got your business that day...**

ORIGINAL THINKING

A different perspective from Patrick Collins' letter in the Sep 2010 issue. There is not much true originality left today... or ever – people either were inspired by or stole ideas from somebody else. I took up the guitar a year ago. I have a Dean Performer Key Lago acoustic and a Gretsch 5235 Pro Jet Electric, both from the Far East. Before this I had never heard of either; my criteria were price, appearance, quality and sound. Fenders, Gibsons and the like were not possible, but Squiers, Fender Mex, Epiphones and Vintage were.

I would love a genuine Strat or ES-335 but I have to eat, and at my level I probably wouldn't notice the difference. Players like myself want to know what guitars that we can afford to buy will sound like. I know what a great Les Paul or Strat sounds like; I'm listening to them right now. But how about, say, a Vintage Fillmore? Thank you for letting me know.

One more thing: I'm a tinkerer, the parts are on the way, and the Gretsch will shortly emerge from the garage sounding and looking like a proper Duo Jet. Who knows, maybe one day I'll get an Alvin Lee-style semi-hollow. You wouldn't consider DIY with the genuine article, but these Eastern guitars are ripe for it and your enjoyment will be gained on many more levels than if it had just been bought off the shelf.

Great magazine, keep it real for players of all monetary means, not just investors.

Russell Begley
New Zealand

EDITOR'S LETTER

One of the many things I admire about great guitar teachers is that they know when their charges need encouragement and when they need a good kick up the backside. Although we all pass judgement on players sometimes, it's a lot easier to say what you think about professionals than beginners.

Many of us will have been subjected to an impromptu recital by someone, such as a friend's child, at one time or another. In those situations, do you: nod and clap approvingly (no matter what you actually think); say it was great, but offer some very gently-worded advice; or bluntly point out where they've gone wrong in great detail?

Unless you've got some sociopathic tendencies, I suspect you've pulled your punches in the past. We all have, and most of the time I think it's the right thing to do. Just don't encourage the budding guitarist and singer-songwriter in your life to go on something like *Britain's Got Talent* if they aren't much cop and watch them get slaughtered – that's just being cruel.

Enjoy the issue...

John Callaghan
EDITOR
www.guitarmagazine.co.uk

Woke Up This Mornin'...

Stop Look & Listen

Albums
Books
DVDs

Motörhead
The Wörld Is Yours
(EMI)

From the ear-crippling double kick drum of *Born To Lose*, Lemmy and his wingmen again prove they can wipe the floor with the youngsters. With Motörhead there's never need for any wheel re-inventing, and this album is what we'd expect. They've long since grasped the power of *attitude* in rock'n'roll, and therein lies their appeal. In *Get Back In Line* Lemmy rants 'All things come to he who waits, but these day most things suck.' *The Wörld Is Yours* is in the minority, then.

Magnum
The Visitation
(Steamhammer/SPV)

With slick production and a healthy stock of power riffs, this is epic stuff. Sixteen albums is an impressive haul for any band, and Magnum have added some modish knob-twiddling to the pot to keep their latest interesting. With the love currently going around for Journey, this dose of '80s dynamic rock could slot into the landscape nicely.

Vinicius Cantuaria & Bill Frisell
Lagrimas Mexicanas
(Naive)

Lagrimas Mexicanas is an intriguing meeting of minds, with Cantuaria's dulcet tones pondering sweetly over Latin flavours while Frisell adds a vital slant. All this is interleaved with shuffling bossa nova percussion, meshing these two colourful worlds together. With love as its theme this is a fitting soundtrack, but lurking in the wings is a flicker of the unfamiliar, nowhere more evident than in the title track with its skew-wiff experimentations. An unexpected partnership, with results to match.

Gary Husband
Dirty & Beautiful
(Abstract Logix)

The bumph describes Husband as the 'ultimate musician's musician'. This accounts for the impressive

array of stars who signed up, but also hints at its likely audience. As a show of skill and imagination, it's indisputably brilliant; as a listening experience, it's challenging to say the least. That said, Husband's outer-limit compositions truly bring out the best in his supporting cast - Holdsworth's exploratory guitar is awesome, as is McLaughlin's jazzy fretwork. One for lovers of contempo-jazz. Complex, but cool.

Foghat
Last Train Home
(Angel Air)

Foghat's singer 'Lonesome' Dave Peverett and drummer Roger Earl had always vowed to put out a blues masterpiece. With the late Peverett in their thoughts, Earl and his latest line-up have created a tender-voiced, sweet-toned affair that will satisfy your blues cravings, with the band covering classics and forging a few of their own.

Snap Judgements

Wanda Jackson
The Party Ain't Over
(Nonesuch)

With Jack White on production duties it was never going to be straight up rock'n'roll and, as such, this feels fresh and playful. Strangely made for one another.

Wire
Red Barked Tree
(Pink Flag)

Many a group has pilfered Wire's back catalogue of art-rock genius, and it's a delight that they still sound so relevant. Daring, disruptive and distinctly Wire.

Fred Kinbom
Hedgehogs And Elephants
(FK)

Brighton-based Kinbom marries lazy grooves and bone-dry melodies with tender lap steel (acoustic, electric, baritone) and double bass. Loose and inviting.

Anna Calvi
Anna Calvi
(Domino)

From the first sensual strum, Calvi has us around her little finger. Luscious vocals, stark rhythms and surfy guitars combine for a brooding, shadowy experience.

Brad Paisley
Hits Alive
(Sony)

Paisley fans unite - there's 25 tracks on this double album: one studio, one live. As far as country licks go, the man certainly nails it. Live, he's a superstar cowboy.

Joan Armatrading
Live At The Albert Hall
(Hypertension)

Armatrading's touching voice is nowhere better appreciated than in the live arena; couple that with her fine guitar playing (and a live DVD) and you're quids in.

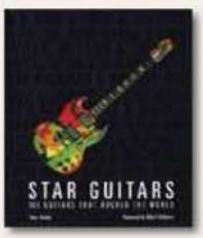
DVDs

Matt Schofield
Blues Guitar Artistry
(Hal Leonard)

Unlike many tuition discs, this comes from a true master of blues technique. On top of his immense ability, Schofield is a likeable soul and proves a fantastic guide for anyone craving improvement. Starting with concepts of the blues genre, there's chapters on tone, cementing your own signature sound, chord voicings, rhythm, groove and timing, and soloing - all nicely punctuated with Schofield and his band showcasing the real deal. From pick angles to complex craft, this is detailed, relaxed and genuinely eye-opening. An enjoyable hour that's certain to take you up a notch or two.

Books

Star Guitars
Dave Hunter
(Voyageur)



Hunter throws light on some of the world's most infamous guitars and their owners in this chunky, stylish tome. Aside from being a thoroughly captivating read, it's fully stocked with superb photos, tour posters and artwork, all adding colour to the tales of these glorified hitmakers. Thankfully it doesn't just focus on the Claptons of this world (although he does get eight pages); there's also ample space allotted for alt-heroes J Mascis and Thurston Moore - a good move. From BB King's Lucille to Brian May's homemade Red Special via a parade of six-string gems, this is the ideal browser's companion. Dip in and out at your leisure.

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Nobody's ashamed to be seen with an inexpensive guitar any more. Roger Cooper traces the story of budget electrics, from virtually unplayable to pro-standard performers

BARGAIN Placement

The phrase 'The Golden Age Of Guitar Making' certainly has a nice ring to it, but when exactly was this apparently idyllic era of excellence? Vintage purists will point to the classic periods from the past, but in reality it's probably the present day, as there's never been a better time to buy a new electric guitar. Build quality and product consistency have continued to rise in recent years, while prices have dropped, resulting in ever better value. So just when and how did good guitars become cheap, or conversely, cheap guitars become good?

The most desirable electrics date from the '50s and '60s, when the big US brands were supposedly producing their best efforts. These now command elevated (some would say over-inflated) prices in the rarefied atmosphere of the vintage guitar arena. Although not what it used to be, this is still an area where only those with fat wallets can afford to tread, while as always, those with modest budgets must make do with less-expensive alternatives.

That's why this month we're documenting the development of guitars on offer at lower levels. Not only do these represent an equally accurate and interesting barometer of progress, but without entry-end electrics almost all famous players wouldn't even have got started. This factor actually makes cheapos more important in the history of music than those boasting bigger price tags.

Regardless of cost, successfully meeting certain basic criteria can make any electric guitar 'good'. Timbers don't have to be high quality, nor does the hardware – it's the combination that counts, and knowing which corners to cut. Major plus points are a nice neck, decent frets, accurate intonation, easy playability and some usable sounds. This may seem obvious in this more-demanding modern day and age, but go back half a century and things were very different, especially at the shallow end of the electric market.

THE '50s: BASIC BEGINNINGS

The overall improvement in instrument quality was a very gradual process. Interest in the electric guitar first took a firm hold here during the late '50s. The skiffle craze had shown that almost anything equipped with six strings would sell, and a similar industry attitude applied to the earliest purpose-built electrics introduced for this all-new market.

Most embryonic axe heroes started their playing careers battling with cheap acoustics that boasted tree-trunk necks, barbed-wire frets and cheese-grater actions. Many of the early electrified equivalents

Any electric guitar can be 'good'. It's not the quality of timber, or the hardware – it's the combination that counts

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Cheap Guitars
Cover Story
VOLUME

were little better, often just adding equally crude pickups and controls. This non-user friendly approach sorted the men from the boys, as only those with true dedication persevered long enough to pass the bleeding finger test and eventually buy something better.

Instrument choice was far from wide in those years. The post-war ban on US imports was still in force, so for a while beginners and experienced players had to make do with alternatives from Europe and elsewhere. Acoustic-electrics initially ruled the roost, and affordable offerings from German makers such as Hofner and Framus were a cut above some of the competition. The former's Senator and President proved popular, soon partnered by the successful, small-sized Club models inspired by Gibson's Les Paul.

Purpose-built solidbody six-strings were even rarer, not becoming officially available here until late 1958. They were often derisively described as planks – a description taken almost literally by some early makers, who offered only the bare minimum – and quality was questionable to say the least, ranging from poor to merely passable. UK importer Selmer started bringing in the Hofner Colorama and the Czech-built Grazioso, the latter soon re-christened Futurama and stylistically the nearest thing to a Fender. The earliest Japanese examples also reached these shores around this time, and diminutive solids marketed under brand names such as Guyatone and Antoria were snapped up by numerous guitarists hankering after something solid, including a young Mr Marvin.

The first home-grown equivalents to target the mass market soon followed, like the very primitive Dallas Tuxedo, which debuted early in 1959, while Dutch maker Egmond contributed to the low-cost cause with the cheap and not very cheerful Lucky Seven and Solid Seven, the latter being Paul McCartney's first electric.

Nowadays most of these low-cost creations would rightly be dismissed as rubbish, but back then they were lapped up by a playing public desperate for anything electric and affordable. Prices ranged from around a tenner to 50 pounds, but an average wage of only a few quid per week meant that acquiring even a cheapo model entailed a pretty severe financial stretch... often with an element of unwilling parental assistance.

Before the US trade embargo was lifted in '59, solidbodies like this Hofner Colorama were about the closest you could get to a Gibson

The end of the '50s saw the first clumsy Japanese solids (like this Guyatone, left) and the first-ever UK-made solidbody, the Dallas Tuxedo (right)

Nowadays most of these low-cost creations would be rightly dismissed as rubbish, but back then they were lapped up

THE '60s: THE ELECTRIC BOOM

The start of the '60s saw the production floodgates open as more and more makers realised money could be made by getting in on the electric act. However, the industry still regarded rock as a shortlived fad, and catered for it accordingly. This meant that quick profits took priority over quality, especially as many makers didn't know – or care – about what constituted a decent electric guitar.

The embargo on US imports had been lifted in June 1959. The first American electrics to appear here arrived in small quantities and at high prices, even the starter six-strings from the likes of Fender and Gibson, while the upmarket models remained well beyond the reach of most players. Electrics from second division manufacturers such as Harmony and Kay offered US cachet for less cost, but even these were pricey, so many young UK guitarists still couldn't indulge in the guitars enjoyed by their US counterparts.

However, although US-made electrics held more appeal, not all were well made, as many manufacturers on that side of the Atlantic were equally exploitative and inconsiderate about what they too saw as a short-stay market.

Soon, the demand was met by less-expensive alternatives from Europe and elsewhere, along with more UK-made electrics. The latter included early versions from Vox and Watkins (the Watkins Rapier became one of the budget classics of the era). Other British builders also came to fore at this time, such as Burns and Fenton-Weill, although Burns did tend to aim higher price-wise than much of the home-grown competition.

Earning levels increased during the decade, and easier credit facilities were available. This economic improvement coincided with the beat boom and sales at all price levels mushroomed to match the innumerable groups being formed across the country. More experienced players could now afford to progress to better

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If you'd never played an EB-2, an ES-175 or a Les Paul, then these Hofners would rock your world

From the '50s to the '60s, Japanese solidbody design morphed from stubby to kooky to nearly-Fender

Timeline

1958: Hofner's earliest Colorama solids join the brand's acoustic-electrics

1958: First Japanese-sourced solids imported here bearing the Antoria or Guyatone brandnames

1959: The Dallas Tuxedo debuts as the first inexpensive UK-made solid electric

1959: The British Government lifts the post-war embargo on US-origin imports

1960: Watkins launches the original version of the Rapier solid six-string

1966: Yamaha's first SG series employs significantly improved construction

1969: The first far eastern copies into the UK include Shaftesbury 'Rickenbackers' and Vox 'Gretsches'

1970: The era of Japanese-origin imitations begins in earnest

1970: Gibson introduces a Japanese-made Epiphone range

1973: Yamaha's twin-cutaway SGs help confirm the improved quality of Japanese manufacture

1982: Fender counter the copy menace by launching their own surrogates under the Squier banner

1993: Yamaha introduces the Pacifica 112V and create a benchmark budget electric

1998: The Danelectro brand is back on guitars after almost 30 years, courtesy of Korean production

2001: PRS unveil their first offshore-origin electric, the Korean-made Santana SE

2009: Ernie Ball opts for Indonesia to manufacture the appropriately-named Sterling series

instruments, while the wallet-friendly end of the market was fuelled by vast hordes of hopefuls. These beginners soon enjoyed a wider choice than ever before, with existing low-budget brands like Broadway bolstered by new imported arrivals bearing brand names such as Audition, Top Twenty, Columbus and Commodore.

By the mid-'60s almost every guitarist aspired to buy something American and virtually all makers from elsewhere suffered accordingly. Those that operated at lower price levels continued to do good business, but quantity still tended to take precedence over quality. Many minimum budget electrics now came from the Far East, but while overall standards had slightly improved, the situation was still far from ideal.

Later in the decade, some Japanese makers, and Yamaha in particular, significantly raised the bar. This improvement was initially apparent on comparatively expensive electrics, but it was soon applied to cheaper examples, including the first of what could be termed 'copies', such as Shaftesbury-branded Rickenbacker repros and Gretsch-style semis from Vox.

Watkins Rapier

Watkins was one of the first companies to offer UK-made solids for the player with shallow pockets. Introduced early in 1960, the Rapier single pickup model sold for £20, while the two-pickup Rapier Deluxe retailed at £24. Both featured a Supro-influenced single-cutaway body shape, but this was subsequently superseded by Strat-like double-cutaway styling that better matched the market trends of the time, as did the change from sunburst to a Fender-ish red finish, partnered by a white scratchplate and vibrato tailpiece. Model designations became the Rapier 22 and 33, with the pickup count increasing to two and three respectively, but prices remained below £30. A four-pickup 44 was added later, and these three were the first choice for many cash-strapped young British guitarists during the '60s. Although lacking the finesse and features of some UK contemporaries, they offered acceptable looks, performance and playability for affordable prices.

Above: typical of 1962-1963, these Guyatone-built Broadways were imported by Rose Morris of the UK

THE '70s: REPROS RULE!

Before the 1970s, most guitar manufacturers had gone their own way design-wise and any copycatting was limited to influence rather than obvious impersonation. The new decade abandoned such subtlety, ushering in almost unlimited quantities of unashamed imitations emanating from the far east.

Having recently been through some tough economic times, Japanese guitar makers suddenly latched on to the commercial potential in offering low-priced lookalikes of US best-selling originals. Appearances were certainly similar, but the flattering to deceive visuals often disguised major cost-related departures in construction and components. On many Gibson clones the necks became bolt-on rather than glued-in; curved tops hid hollow interiors; single-coils served as pseudo-humbuckers. Equally fake Fenders fared a little better, but truss-rods, pickups, plastic, metalwork and other features were frequently far from authentic.

Despite such differences, these Japanese-made duplicates did much to help raise the standard of inexpensive electrics, while players' lives improved as makers worldwide now had to survive by competing in terms of quality and cost. Those that couldn't went under, and quite a few makers literally went west when faced with this invasion from the east.

Guitars like the Tokai Springy Sound drove Fender to launch the Squier brand

The market in the UK was awash with imitations as virtually every UK importer climbed on the copy bandwagon. Prices ranged from around £50 to a few hundred, with the more expensive examples coming correspondingly closer to their US inspirations. Prime exponents of the aping art included Aria and Ibanez, and these brands became well established, although demand still was great enough to ensure that a multitude of lesser logos like Avon, Eros, Kimbara and Shaftesbury also enjoyed a share of the sales during the '70s.

However, not every Japanese maker concentrated exclusively on copies and during the latter part of the decade original efforts from companies such as Aria, Ibanez and Yamaha confirmed that country's manufacturing capabilities had finally come of age, offering quality on a par with virtually anything from America but at much more competitive prices.

The '70s abandoned all subtlety, ushering in unlimited unashamed imitations emanating from the Far East

THE '80s: OFFICIAL IMITATIONS

This escalation in far eastern guitar-building standards also affected the still very affordable imitations being produced in that part of the world. Player popularity finally forced Fender to counter the loss of sales caused by copy specialists such as Tokai, and their response came in the shape of Squier, created in 1982 to adorn a range of officially sanctioned, Japanese-origin equivalents of Fender originals. This proved to be both effective and very successful, and the early Squiers offered a quality-to-cost ratio that has since become a benchmark for many subsequent inexpensive electrics.

Gibson met the challenge in similar fashion, but had done so much earlier, ceasing production of US Epiphones in 1970 and initially applying this famous name to a low-priced line of Japanese-origin approximations. As costs in that country later rose, Epiphone manufacture moved first to Taiwan, then to Korea. This purely economics-determined production pattern would be repeated for the majority of those involved in guitar mass-making worldwide.

While guitar design became more adventurous in the '80s, surrogate Strats, Les Pauls and the like still held sway over much of the market, especially in the lower retail regions. The advent of rock-orientated features such as hotter pickups and heavy-duty locking vibrato systems introduced some more variety right across the price spectrum, while graphic designs and flashy colour schemes helped brighten up appearances. The emphasis was still on offering a great deal for less dosh, but including all these extras entailed some pruning in the production process, so not all small budget, souped-up six-strings were quite as impressive as they seemed.

Below and far left: Ibanez was among the top makers in the copycat wars of the 1970s

The end of the '80s brought a return to simpler thinking and design, which certainly helped to restore the balance between cost and quality. This was welcomed by manufacturers faced with the dilemma of keeping prices competitive while still making feasible profit margins.

Yamaha Pacifica 112V

Arriving three years after the launch of the Pacifica line, the least expensive 112V shared the same slimmed-down Strat-derived styling supplied by US designer Rich Lasner, but the scratchplate carried all three pickups, including a bridge humbucker. Just £200 bought decent hardware, a very playable maple neck and an alder or basswood body – quite a bonus, because plywood was still very common on similarly priced solids. This impressive spec prompted many competitors to improve their quality, and the Pacifica 112V has since become the brand's most successful electric. It's still going strong, too, although the latest model displays a few design differences.

Photo: Thanks to The Guitar Encyclopedia/Balafon

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THE '90s: OLD NAMES, NEW IDEAS

Thanks to the close connections with their famous parent companies, Epiphone and Squier continued to lead the low budget market, adding the occasional original to spice up their ranges of more predictable lower-priced Gibson and Fender equivalents. Many competitors stayed on the straight and narrow copy path, but this decade brought a new trend – reviving deceased guitar brands from the past, and either re-creating the best-known examples of each breed or introducing all-new alternatives. Long-gone American budget brand Danelectro was an obvious subject for such treatment, the end result being an electric range that echoed the originals via a combination of typically quirky character and very approachable prices.

Yamaha adopted a more modern approach by cleverly combining imitation and originality for their Fender-influenced Pacificas, introduced in 1990. The Pacifica range later included the Taiwan-made, Tele-ish 311, which offered a very impressive specification and level of performance for around £300, while the least expensive and long-running 112 is regarded as a low budget landmark model and has become the company's most successful electric.

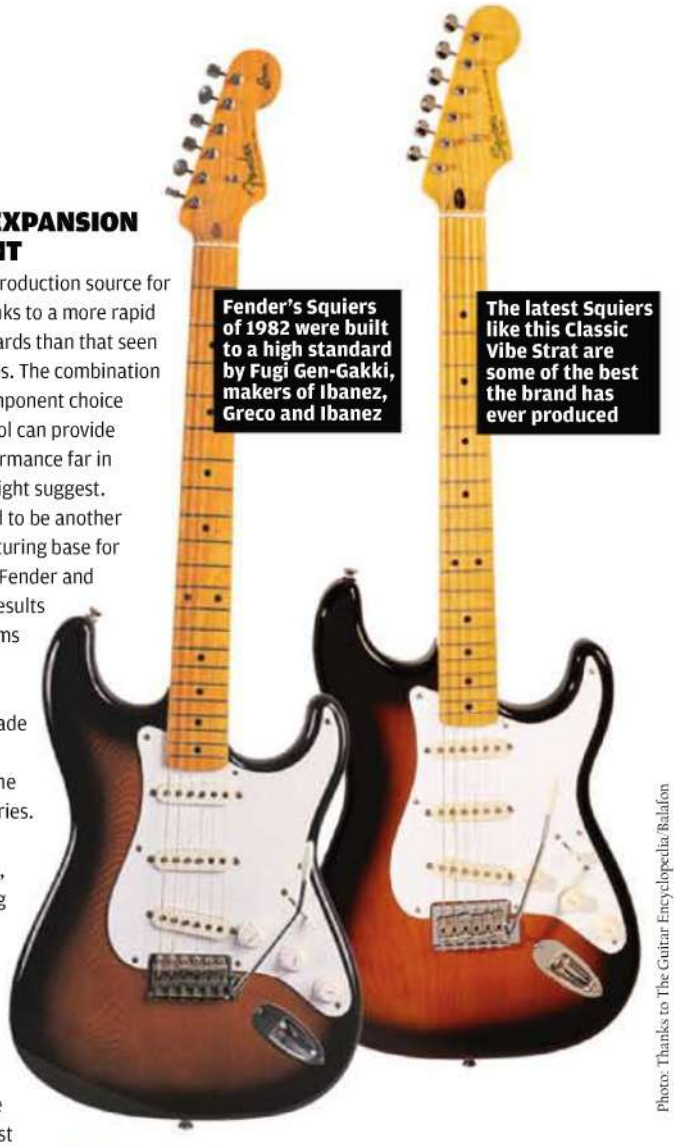
High-end US makers PRS followed the offshore trend in 2001 with this Santana SE

THE NOUGHTIES: EXPANSION AND IMPROVEMENT

China has become a major production source for many guitar companies thanks to a more rapid improvement in build standards than that seen in other far eastern countries. The combination of good design, sensible component choice and consistent quality control can provide instruments that offer performance far in excess of what their price might suggest.

Indonesia has also proved to be another lucrative off-shore manufacturing base for many big makers, including Fender and Yamaha, although the end results do seem to vary more in terms of attention to important details. Some of the more recent Squiers have been made here, and one of the better examples was the '51 from the brand's Vintage Modified Series.

Thanks to these sources and Korea's on-going output, virtually every guitar making name of note now offers a line of less expensive, close approximations of their upmarket creations, including PRS (SE) and Music Man (Sterling). There's also still no shortage of low-cost clones of the most popular US originals, plus numerous variations on these long-established themes, all marketed under a bewildering array of names. Others offer affordable interpretations of oddball oldies (Eastwood) or retro-flavoured all-new alternatives (Italia, Hutchins, Alden), courtesy of cost-conscious production facilities that allow complex design ideas to be offered for relatively small sums.



Fender's Squiers of 1982 were built to a high standard by Fugi Gen-Gakki, makers of Ibanez, Greco and Ibanez

The latest Squiers like this Classic Vibe Strat are some of the best the brand has ever produced

Photo: Thanks to The Guitar Encyclopedia Balafon

Fender's Squier range of 1982 offered a quality to cost ratio that has become a benchmark for inexpensive electrics

The quality demarcation between beginner and 'proper' instruments was very noticeable during the '50s and '60s, but things have improved, narrowing the gap consistently and considerably, until the distinction has become sufficiently blurred enough not to even matter.

This improvement hasn't happened overnight. It's the end result of evolving upgrades that now span more than half a century, instigated by improved manufacturing skills, greater knowledge and an increasingly discerning market. Tried and tested design, effective construction and the best use of less-expensive ingredients has maximised value for money. It's all a question of cutting the right corners, and these days most manufacturers seem to have this down to a fine art.

That said, the adage 'you get what you pay for' still applies, and there are still plenty of eBay/mail-order horrors out there. But these are more the exception than the rule. Despite what vintage purists may preach, we're lucky to be living in an era when instruments really never have been better in terms of performance for the pound. This truly is a time when good guitars are cheap... and cheap guitars are good.

The Squier '51

The Indonesian-made Squier '51 of 2004 cleverly combined features from various Fenders. The maple neck was pure Tele, while the black, sunburst or blonde basswood body was like a scaled-down Precision bass (the P-Bass debuted in 1951, hence the '51' name, although the contouring resembled Fender's revised four-string of 1954, so Squier '54 would have been more accurate). The bass image was reinforced by a suitably-shaped scratchplate and an small metal control plate which carried a three-way rotary pickup selector plus a volume pot incorporating a push/pull coil-tap for the bridge humbucker. There was also an angled single-coil at the neck, while the six-saddle bridge used top stringing to make production simpler. Retailing at £139, the cost-conscious Squier '51 offered excellent playability and very versatile performance. Although it proved pretty popular, production ceased in 2007.

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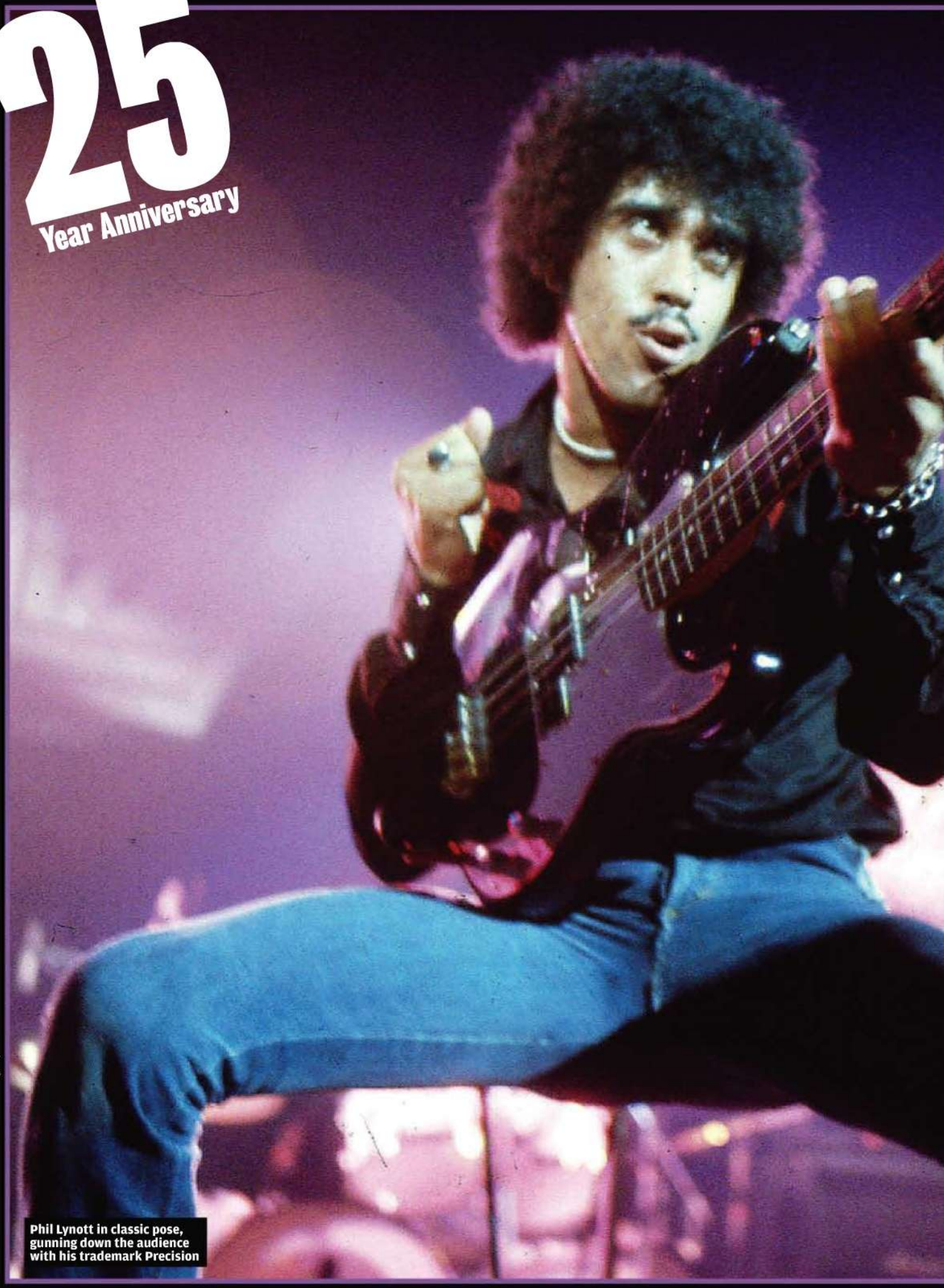

Phil Lynott in classic pose, gunning down the audience with his trademark Precision

Photo: Laurens Van Houten / Frank White Photo Agency

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Renegade Rocker

In January 1986, we lost one of rock music's most charismatic performers. Michael Heatley salutes Phil Lynott of Thin Lizzy

They say performers are born, not made. In the case of Phil Lynott, who passed away 25 years ago this month, the opposite is true. The charismatic Irishman worked tirelessly on his image and stage presence after a rude awakening courtesy of Animals bassist turned rock band manager Chas Chandler – so if credit is due for the iconic splay-legged image that adorned Thin Lizzy's classic *Live And Dangerous* double album, then maybe some should go Chandler's way.

The date was 23 November 1972, and Chas, the former Hendrix svengali now managing Slade, had just witnessed Lizzy following the booed-off Suzi Quatro onto the stage of Newcastle City Hall. The usually genial Geordie, anxious for a good show to kick off Slade's tour on his home turf, was dismayed by what he saw – and said so. For Lynott, the impact was brutal and immediate, as Lizzy founder and guitarist Eric Bell recalls.

'We came out on stage and it was like entering the gladiators' arena,' he recalls ruefully. 'All they wanted to do was to see Slade, so we just stood there and played the blues with our heads down. After the show, if you could call it a show, we went back to the dressing room, and Chas Chandler came in. He used to manage Hendrix, Philip's hero.

'Now Chas went fuckin' mad! "What's all that about?" he said. "You're here to fuckin' wake up the crowd, not to send them to sleep." He was looking at Philip as he said this. "And you, you'd better get your fuckin' act together. Don't wear black," he said, "wear colourful clothes, and then your movements are exaggerated. I was at the back of the hall watching you, and you looked like three fuckin' statues."

'Philip was on the verge of tears when Chas walked out. It was really heavy – he was going to throw us off the tour, and this was the very first night! So that's when Philip really started working on his stage presence.'

It was a natural development, as Lynott was the band's chief songwriter as well as singer. Showband veteran Bell, previously the live spokesperson, was shunted sideways and out of the spotlight while Phil grabbed centre stage with both hands. As a black Irish kid from a single-parent family, he identified with the underdog and didn't lack the motivation to take the main chance when it was offered.

Lynott, the junior member of the trio as far as instrumental prowess was concerned, overcame his initial feelings of inadequacy to develop a style all his own. Having composed the songs on a nylon-stringed acoustic, he would treat his bass as a rhythm guitar to drive them along with repeated downstrokes of the plectrum. His hero was Paul McCartney and, on reading the ex-Beatle sang his bass patterns before learning them, Lynott could often be found doing this before gigs as he experimented with new ideas.

Phil also tied his bass patterns in with long-time confederate Brian Downey's drumming, as Eric Bell reveals. 'When trying a new song for the first time, I'd be sitting in the corner reading *Melody Maker* for 45 minutes, not having played one note. He'd be saying "Hey, Brian, what's that break you play after this?" Brian would play it and Phil would pattern his bass playing around the drum break. It took forever, but he got results. I didn't realise it at the time, but it was the best rhythm section I ever played with.'

Scott Gorham – who, with Brian Robertson, took over guitar duties in 1974 after Bell walked – points at the fact that Marco Mendoza, who plays

with the current Lizzy line-up, 'is always coming up to me and saying "Hey, Scott, just check out what Phil's doing here. It's perfect - he's picking these notes out to flow into this next part." When you get an A-list bass player copying what he did and saying how great Phil was, that gives you an indication how well he really did play the bass. But Phil didn't ever toot his own horn... he didn't think he was the greatest bass player going.

'He went for a different kind of tone,' Gorham continues. 'You can't really hear it on the studio albums, which is a shame... you hear it more on the live stuff. His sound was really powerful but really clean at the same time, so it stuck out in the mix. It wasn't a kind of sound that ever got buried inside the mix - a subliminal sound, if you will. He wanted the sound to stick out, at least to a certain degree.'

Lizzy's stratospheric rise to fame after the 1974 recruitment of Gorham and Robertson is comparatively well documented. 'The chemistry was right - they looked the part,' concedes Eric Bell. However, he believes the motivation for success remained primarily Lynott's. 'Philip had incredible energy, incredible determination - you couldn't put the guy down. He had this vision that he wanted to be rich and famous, and nothing was going to stop him. He was about 80 per cent of the driving force to make the band a success. I remember when, in the early days, he started getting royalty cheques - he would pay someone's telephone bill for the office, just to keep the band going.'

Phil Lynott's flower-strewn resting place in St Fintan's cemetery, Sutton, County Dublin

The ever-loyal Lynott also turned down overtures in the early days from Ritchie Blackmore, even then planning his escape from supergroup Deep Purple. He came to Lizzy gigs and sat right in front of the stage, but Phil turned him down, and appeared to be rewarded with the unexpected singles success of *Whiskey In The Jar*. The rocked-up Irish folksong, a UK Number 6 hit in early 1973, was a one-off, untypical of the band's output, and it proved impossible to follow up. They found themselves in the pubs and clubs when, weeks before, they'd been flown first class around the globe to mime on TV.

Expectations had grown and the band were now told by management what to play, do and say. 'It was like Brian Epstein and the Beatles, basically,' said Bell. 'Before he discovered them they drank, smoked and wore leather jackets - all that went. They had to wear suits and so on. Being young and headstrong I didn't want to do those things, but Philip was happy to change that way, saying "Listen, man, I think they're right; we'd better work out what to say." It got to me, and I left.' For Phil's part, anything was better than returning to the UK gig circuit they knew all too well. It was time for one final roll of the dice and a transfusion of new blood.

It was at this point that Scott Gorham first met Phil Lynott, and they would spend the next decade more or less permanently in each other's company. 'In each other's pockets,' notes Gorham. 'We were in close proximity when touring...

Man With The Mirror: A Phil Lynott Gearfile

Phil Lynott rang the changes with his equipment before settling on his black Fender Precision with the mirror guard which, though sometimes supplanted by an Ibanez Roadster (and, briefly, a BC Rich Mockingbird), would become his trademark instrument in the mid-'70s. He earlier had a Dan Armstrong 'see through' Plexiglas bass, visible on Lizzy's *Top Of The Pops* appearance promoting *Whiskey In The Jar*, and, when a very old Fender Jazz was stolen, he bought a Rickenbacker in emulation of Paul McCartney.

As far as amplification went he started off a Marshall man, switching to Acoustic amps after being impressed with the tone Slade's Jim Lea obtained on tour. 'He was always chopping and changing his equipment,' says Eric Bell. 'Every time I went to rehearsal he would have a different bass guitar or a different amp. He said he wasn't the best bass player in the world, but he wanted to get the best sound.'

'He went through phases,' confirms Scott Gorham. 'The Rickenbacker was the first bass guitar I saw him with; when I came down to the first jam session with him that's what he was wearing, and he used that particular guitar for the first couple of years I was in the band. Then he changed and took up the Fender, then the Music Man, then he latched onto the Ibanez, and those became the favourites.'

Amp-wise, Gorham recalls Phil remained faithful to 'an amp system called a Dynacord. It wasn't a massive stack, just one standard 100W stack... and that was it! We were going out and playing these fuckin' stadiums and he wouldn't double up, he didn't seem to need it. Phil Lynott hit those strings harder than I've seen anybody hit bass guitar strings, and it's really what kept everybody in line... because even if you couldn't hear the drums, there was that steady groove all night long. Everybody knew where they were, just through Phil. That's how strong the guy played.'

A bronze statue now stands as a tribute to Lynott on Harry Street in the centre of Dublin

'Phil hit those strings harder than I've seen anybody hit bass guitar strings' – Scott Gorham

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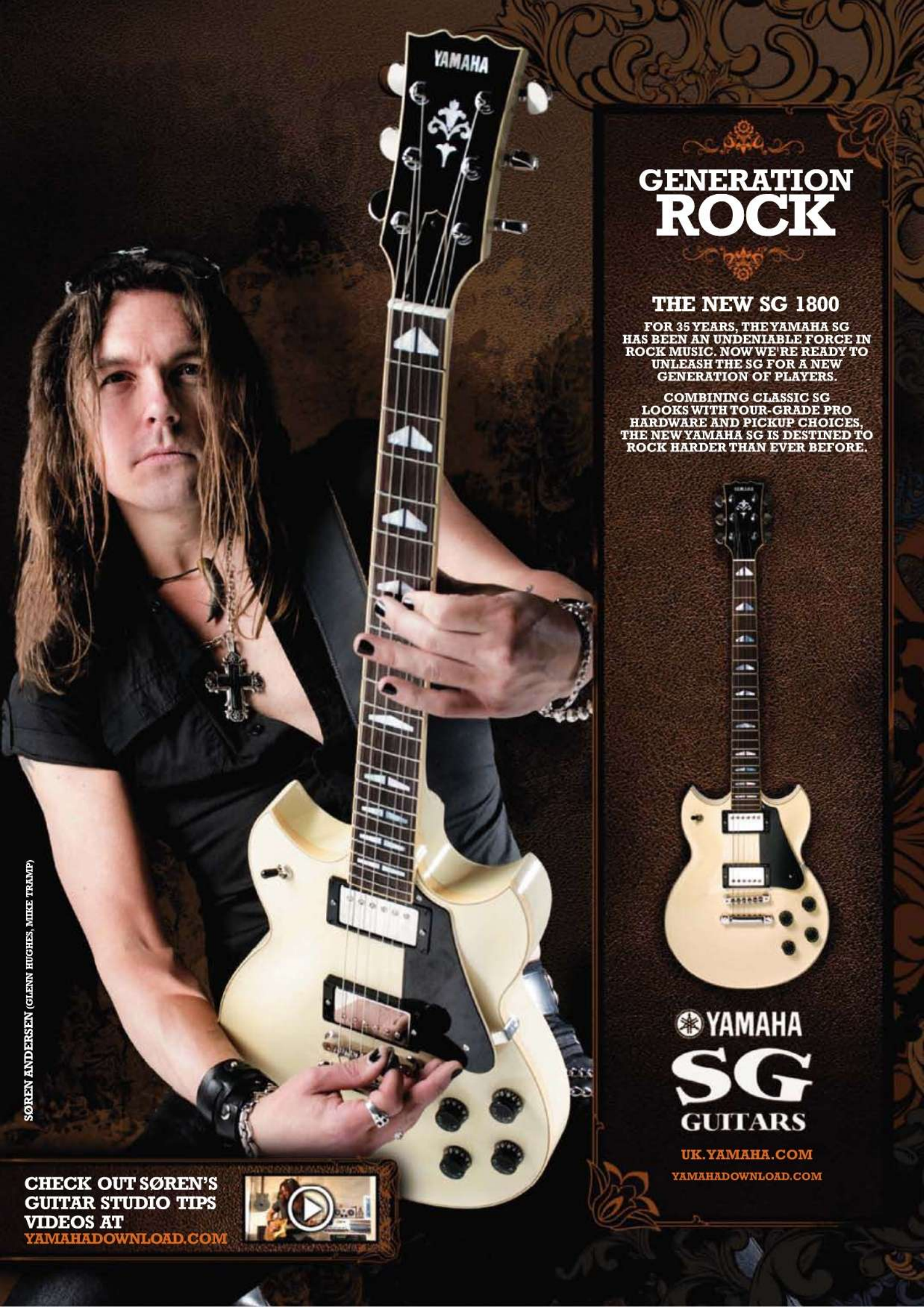
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Later Lizzy: Lynott, Brian Downey, Brian Robertson and Scott Gorham

and we were never off the road.

'He was an extremely talented guy, and talented guys go through a lot of different moods. Trying to find inspiration... and if you can't find inspiration, you get a bit depressed. Full of energy one day, down the next. Phil was just a regular guy but he was like a regular guy on steroids - a big, big personality. It took all you had to hang in with him. That's why there were so many different people in the band on that right hand side of the stage, where the [other] guitar player was - a lot of the guys weren't able to handle the intensity.'

This writer had the pleasure of meeting Phil Lynott twice. The first time, backstage after a gig on the *Jailbreak* tour that elevated the band to first division status in 1976, found him bouncing off the ceiling, eager for narcotics, women (or preferably both) and anxious for the Manchester United football result. The second occasion, three years later at a north London rehearsal studio, was quite different: this time he was a withdrawn, quiet character who would barely speak unless spoken to. It was the gap between these public and private personas that he appears to have filled with the hard drugs that weakened his body and hastened his eventual demise.

Scott Gorham shared this problem with him, but the fact he was able to kick the habit was of little help to his pal. 'It's a shame, because I managed to get off the drugs and showed him that I could do it. But I think, at that point, it had gone too far for him. If he'd stopped the day that he saw me all cleaned up, if he'd said "Right, I'll stop it right now," it still would have been too late - it had gone too far.

'Phil was just a regular guy, but he was like a regular guy on steroids' – Scott Gorham

'Some times it was maybe looking for writing inspiration, other times it was probably flat-out boredom. There's a lot of down-time on the road, you're trying to fill blank areas, and what better way at the time than to do some recreational drugs? We'd kill some time that way. After a while... it's really grabbing onto you, and before you know it you're stuck in a pretty bad place you can't get out of.

'And you have to remember back then that rehab and drug awareness wasn't as available as it is today - the information

Time Line

1949
Philip Parris Lynott was born the illegitimate son of a Brazilian father and Irish mother

1969
Thin Lizzy formed in Dublin by Lynott, Eric Bell and Brian Downey. Keyboardist Eric Wrixon is quickly dropped as they become a fashionable power trio

1971
***Thin Lizzy*, the first of three albums recorded for Decca Records, is released but fails to make much of a mark. Relentless touring follows**

1973
***Whiskey In The Jar*, a rocked-up version of an Irish folk song that had topped the Irish charts for four months, becomes a shock worldwide success**

1974
The Scots-American pairing of Brian Robertson and Scott Gorham replace guitarist Eric Bell and forge the band's trademark twin-lead style

1976
Jailbreak* becomes the band's breakthrough album, reaching UK Number 10 and featuring iconic single *The Boys Are Back In Town

1978
***Live And Dangerous* reaches Number 2 and makes the US Hot Hundred, but band loses Robertson for good. He is eventually replaced by guitarist Snowy White**

1983
Lizzy split, Lynott stating they have become 'predictable and directionless'. The final line-up includes future Whitesnake axeman John Sykes

1984
Phil forms the band Grand Slam with young hotshot guitarist Laurence Archer, but the project never takes off

1986
Phil Lynott dies of 'heart failure and pneumonia following septicemia'. He was just 36

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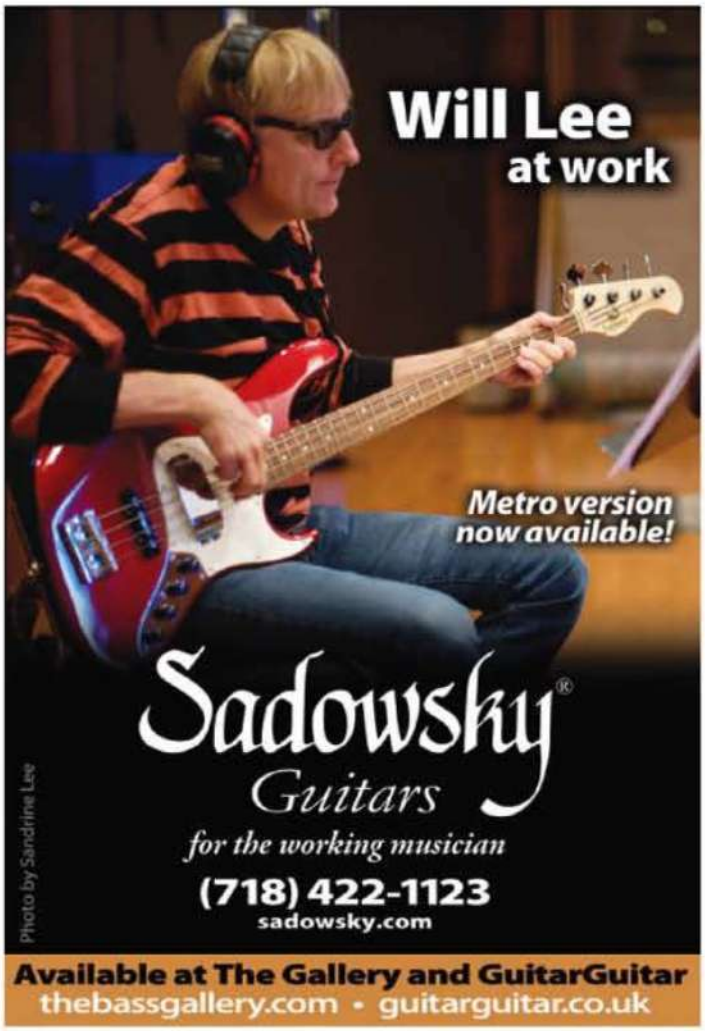

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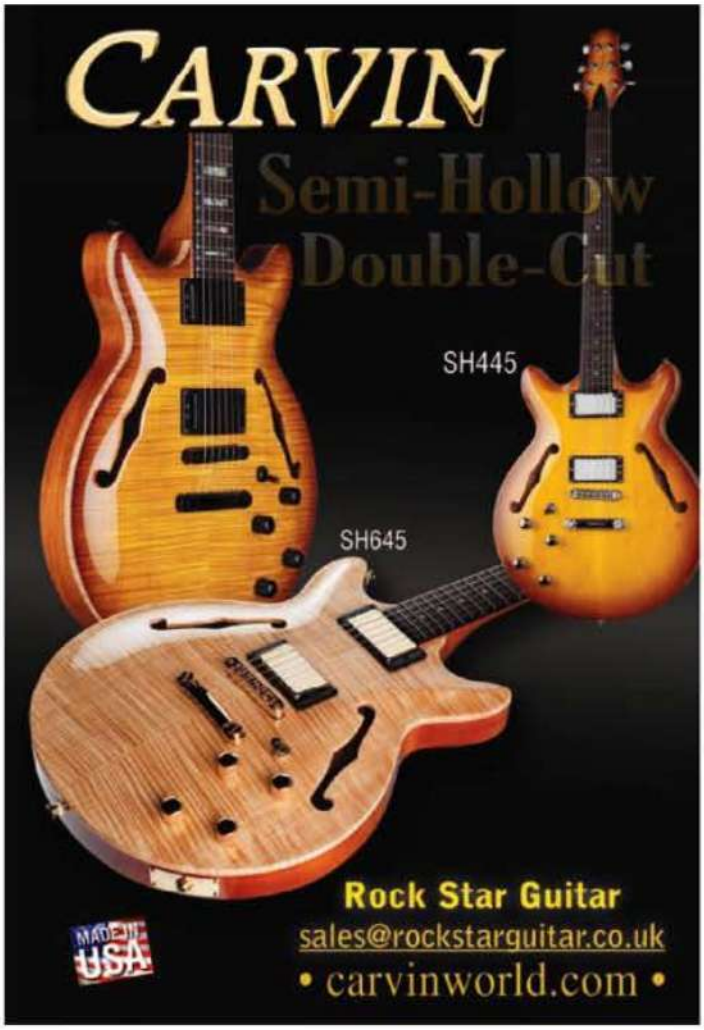

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Photo: Mick Rock / REDFERNS

'He would love to have been remembered as a dashing romantic buccaneer type. A swaggering personality. And of course for his songwriting, which he took extremely seriously' – Eric Bell

that tells you that if you do that too much it's gonna kick your ass and you're probably going to die. There was none of that.' Phil's death, Gorham believes, 'was an accident of the era.'

Eric Bell likens Phil to Rory Gallagher and Jimi Hendrix. 'They were mellow, but when they got on stage they took on an alter-ego,' he says. Bell last saw Lynott eight months before he died. 'It was in a 7-11 shop. He had put on weight and he looked bloated. But he was still Philip.

'He thought he was indestructible, thought he could do anything he wanted as much as possible and still carry on. Towards the end, his friends all said at some point, "Listen, Philip, I can't help noticing you're really going downhill." And he'd turn around and say, "Mind your own fuckin' business. It's my problem, don't lecture me." He would turn his back on any advice that was given to him. "Forget it, man, I'm okay." He didn't listen.'

And as for how he is remembered as a rock icon, Eric feels Phil would by and large be happy. 'I'm not sure about the heroin thing, what he would think of that, but he would love to have been remembered as a dashing romantic buccaneer type – a great guy with the chicks and a great guy with the blokes. A swaggering personality. And of course he'd like to be remembered for his songwriting, which he took extremely seriously.'

Scott Gorham insists that, were his buddy still alive, 'He'd be out here with me right now! He was the first guy to get up on the stage. He would have been the first guy in the studio. If I'd said hey, let's go remix this stuff, he'd have been sitting at the desk tearing the songs apart, saying "All right, let's do this, let's do that." He was always one to push forward. So if he was here today he'd be sitting here in LA and we'd be rehearsing for a tour.'

Photo: Laurens Van Houten / Frank White Photo Agency

Lynott and Gorham in 1979 and nearing the end of Thin Lizzy's road

Jim Fitzpatrick, Lizzy's sleeve designer of choice, was a close friend and presents another hypothesis. He says Lynott told him just before he died that he was 'tired and bored with being a macho heavy metal stud,' and believes his record company would not let him grow up. 'They wanted *The Boys Are Back In Town* part 40, while Philip wanted to be a bluesy Jack Kerouac.'

Sadly, we will never know what 'Philo' still had left to give. But the Lizzy legacy is being celebrated by Scott Gorham, Brian Downey and keyboardist Darren Wharton, who will be playing the UK in January 2011, the month of the 25th anniversary. 'When you're up there playing,' says Scott, 'the spirit of Phil still lives on that stage. Each night, towards the end, we always include Phil [in the introductions]. He always gets the biggest cheer.'

There will also be deluxe double-disc reissues of Thin Lizzy's later output by Universal over the forthcoming 18 months, starting with the classic mid-'70s trilogy of *Jailbreak*, *Johnny The Fox* and *Live And Dangerous* in late January. Remixes, rough mixes, BBC sessions and a live DVD will help ensure the music, and maybe a bit of the magic, of Phil Lynott lives on.

Scott Gorham and Brian Downey will lead a new Thin Lizzy line-up on a UK tour from 6-23 January – see www.livenation.co.uk for dates

Irish Inspiration

Though Phil Lynott took much of his inspiration from America (think *The Cowboy Song*, *Southbound* and many more), he remained proudly Irish. 'I don't think I've ever met someone so patriotic,' says Scott Gorham. 'At every American radio interview he practically wore the Irish flag, making sure everybody knew we weren't a British band, a Scottish band or a European band... this was an Irish band. He would tell everyone where Ireland was – a lot of people in America didn't even know! If there was anybody in the vicinity who said anything derogatory about Ireland in Phil's earshot, it was fighting talk: 'Fook it, let's go outside.'

The famous 'Dino's Bar and Grill' of *The Boys Are Back In Town* was found when Phil went searching for 77 Sunset Strip, scene of a TV detective series. 'It was really big at the time,' Scott recalls, 'so he went looking for it. He asked this guy, and the guy said, well, there's really no such place, it's that place over there. He pointed to Dino's Bar, where *77 Sunset Strip* was filmed. So just to make it more Americanised, Phil put the "Grill" in!'

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Architect Of Sound

Phil Manzanera has never taken the easy path, the slick lick or the obvious manoeuvre. Joe Matera meets the guitarist who's once again out on the road with Roxy Music... with better gear this time

Returning to the road after a 10 year hiatus, Roxy Music are set to reclaim past glories. 'Essentially, we're playing music from the '70s,' says Phil Manzanera, the group's long-serving guitarist. 'It's a music that's driven us back together. If we don't play these songs, nobody else will. The band recorded over 80 songs, but you never hear more than a couple of Roxy Music songs on the radio these days. And today, you have all this great gear, so the sound on stage is so much better and much more controlled. The experience for the punters is so much better than it ever was.'

With an intoxicating mix of avant-garde, über-cool and electronica, Roxy Music crafted a cinematic aural approach and a visual template for the 1970s. They permeated the roots of punk – the Sex Pistols cited them as an influence – and informed the new wave, synth-dominated sounds of the 1980s. Holding all those layers together was Manzanera's clever guitar work, informed largely by his passion for Latin American rhythms, experienced first hand while growing up.

'The great thing about South American music,' begins Manzanera, 'and the reason why it took so long for rock'n'roll and pop music to have any impact in South America is that they had a very strong indigenous music with a great groove of their own. Those rhythms have always stayed with me. So whenever a Roxy Music track was put forward to play on, or something I or we wrote, I'd always try to have double time in it, or 16ths, to make the whole thing speed along.'

'I'd never seen a Firebird before, but I thought it was beautiful... and perfect for Roxy Music. It cost about £160'

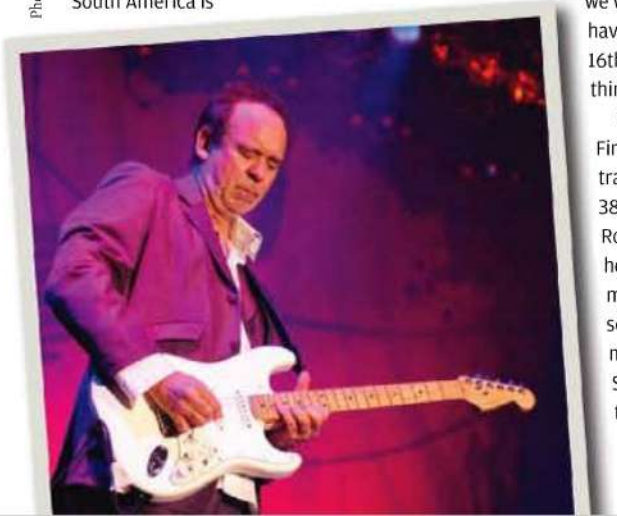

Photo: Steve Gillett / Livepix

Manzanera's red Gibson Firebird has been his trademark for the past 38 years. 'When I joined Roxy in 1972 I had a 335,' he says. 'They wanted me to have a white Strat, so I borrowed some money and bought one. Soon after, I looked in the *Melody Maker* and there was an ad, "Red Firebird for sale." The seller was a young American who had come over from Kalamazoo with his parents. I'd never seen one before, but I thought it was beautiful... and perfect for Roxy. It cost about £160.

'I've got one other red Firebird, which was made for me by Gibson a couple years ago. They were going to bring out a signature version, but it never went into production. My main Firebird is unlike any other Gibson, particularly the mini-humbuckers, which Gibson weren't able to replicate in that newer version. They give a very controlled type of distortion which sits very well in the recording medium. I used it pretty much for all of the second, third and fourth Roxy albums. It's a distortion which finds a space without spilling over into other areas and instruments.'

Catalogue

PHIL MANZANERA DIAMOND HEAD

Prog, pop, Latin; Manzanera's first solo outing. New edition out on 31 January along with a re-release of *Quiet Sun* by Mainstream, Manzanera's first band

ROXY MUSIC STRANDED

First post-Eno album sees the group moving on from art-rock. Manzanera's blistering solo on *Amazona* is one of the album's finest moments

PHIL MANZANERA FIREBIRD VII

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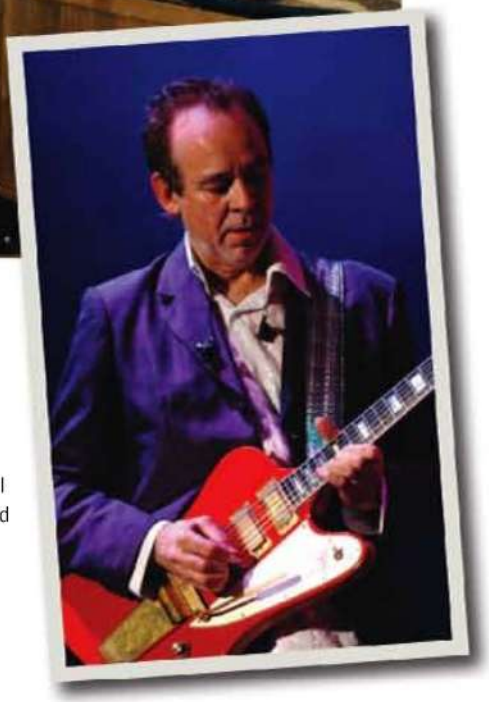
Gear

Guitars: Gibson Firebird, Custom Les Paul, Fender Strat
Amps: Fender DeVille
Effects: Roland VG-99, Digidesign Eleven guitar processor, Line 6 G90 wireless system, Roland FC-300 MIDI foot controller, Line 6 M13

Some of Manzanera's tools: Hofner, Levinson Blade, Strat, customised non-reverse Firebird, Tele with humbucker, LP Custom, Firebird VII, two Deans and a Rickenbacker 12



Manzanera has always been a sonic experimenter. In the mid-'70s his short-lived outing with 801 introduced 'direct injection recording' to the live arena. 'We wanted to record a concert,' recalls Manzanera. 'So we brought along a mobile studio. It seemed obvious to us that what you did was just stick a mic in front of the speaker and go straight into the tape recorder. It turned out nobody had done it like that before; all recordings had been done coming out of the desk in front of the hall, where you had all the acoustics of the hall to deal with too. But Brian [Eno] and I had been messing around with tape recorders for years, so by the time we came to record that album we'd been doing demos and stuff for 10 years, and we knew a lot about tape and semi-pro recording.'

Manzanera agrees that modern technology's unlimited potential can fuel a perfectionist streak. 'Roxy Music record every show onto Pro Tools - it's so easy today,' he says. 'You just press a couple of buttons and because it's all linked up with the onstage mics, you're able to capture every night. But because every night is different, like the solos, you're always trying to get that perfect version of *Love Is The Drug* or *Do The Strand*.'

In recent years Manzanera has forged a relationship with David Gilmour, co-producing his last solo album and playing with his touring band. 'For a guitarist, it's a dream. You couldn't be in a better place,' he says. 'David has the best guitars and equipment and has the most amazing things sent to him all the time! He spends a lot of time on the sound, and that's something I've always been into as well. His tone is beautiful, but it just doesn't happen like that. He's got very good ears and is very in tune. He has a strobe tuner onstage and always keeps one eye on it, so when he's bending the notes he wants those notes to be beautifully in tune.'

'Cheap mics can be good. You want some of that roughness and excitement'

With all the sonic palette at his disposal and ingenuity, one thing has always underscored Manzanera's guitar playing philosophy. 'Less is more, really,' he says. 'I always prefer sound and economy over ridiculous technique.'

RECORDING: THE MANZANERA METHOD

Manzanera has good advice on recording guitars. 'Position one mic in the middle and one to the side of the speaker cone, then mix the two and you should get a good sound,' he says. 'The type of mic is crucial. Some are good for vocals, some are better for guitars, but that's where it starts to get specialized. For electric guitar, a cheap mic is probably better – you want some of that distortion and roughness and excitement, especially if you're going into digital. If you only have one microphone, stick it in front of and in the middle of the speaker cone but a little bit back, to allow air to flow between the mic and the speaker. Ultimately it's a series of choices of what sounds good to your ears... so if it sounds good to you, then it is good.'

DID YOU KNOW?

- Manzanera's hands appeared playing a solo in an episode of Red Dwarf
- Before joining Roxy Music in 1972, Phil was the band's sound engineer
- Since 1980 he has owned and operated his own recording unit, Gallery Studio
- At the age of 18, he rejected a university place to pursue music full-time

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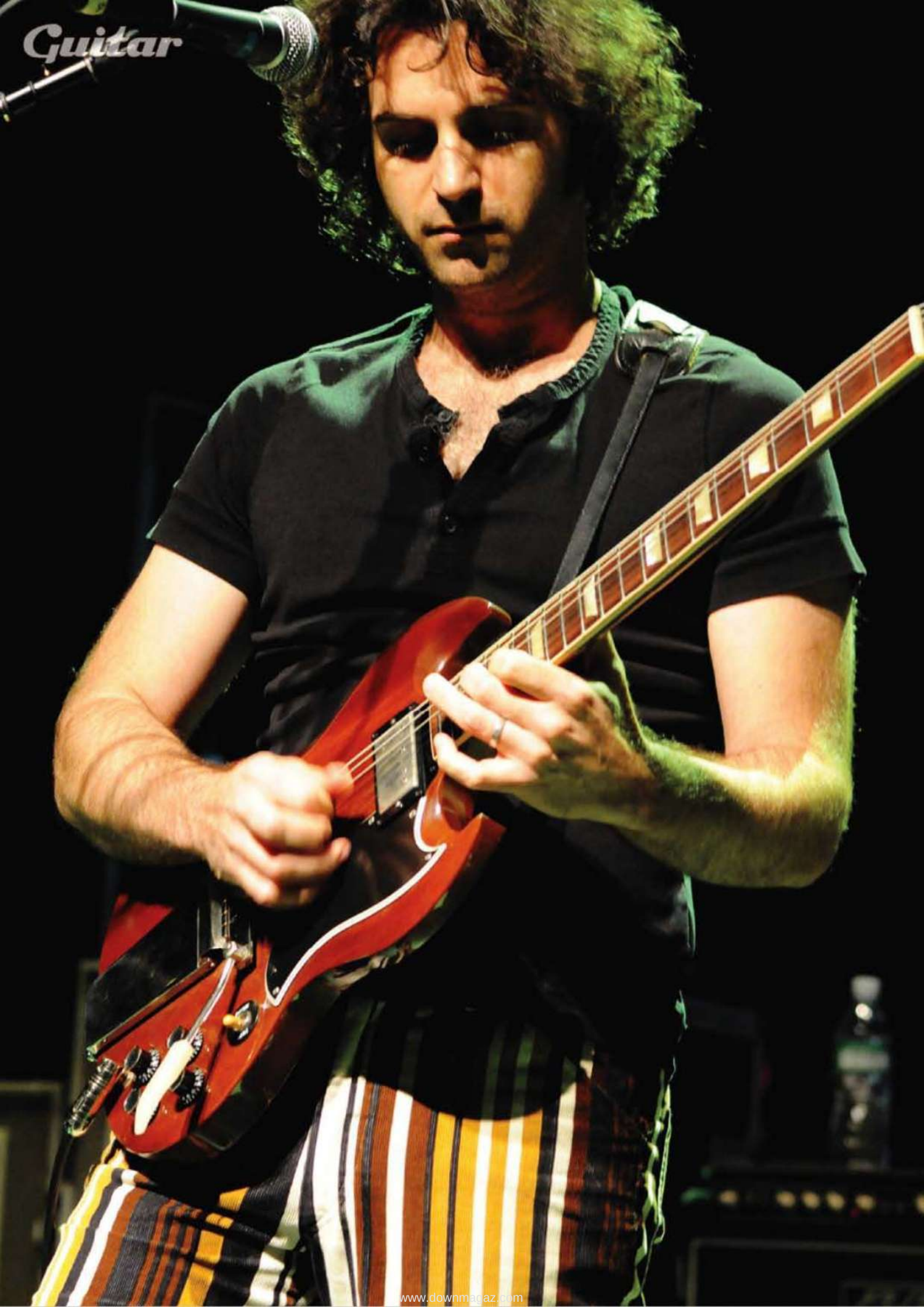

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Gene Genius

Where better to hear an authentic tribute to Frank Zappa than at a Zappa Plays Zappa concert, with his son carrying the torch? Dweezil Zappa discusses the pros and cons of a famous surname and other matters with Alan Clayson

No doubt, famous names open doors. The ease with which Julian Lennon secured a record deal might be the most renowned example of an illustrious surname furnishing a musical career with both the best and worst start, but the phenomenon is nothing new: it's been happening since Peter and Anthony, the offspring of Lonnie Donegan.

It's a sword that cuts both ways. Take Dweezil Zappa: though his discography contains both his own compositions and intriguing interpretations of such disparate artists as Bizet, the Bee Gees and Britney Spears, he's busy presenting the music of his late father in concert... and on disc. Indeed, his latest album is entitled *Return Of The Son Of...* in keeping with world tours for the past four years, fronting Zappa Plays Zappa, an LA-based revue focussed on the works of his father, a man whose instrumental prowess remains a hard yardstick for any guitarist, let alone that of an elder son.

However, when we meet with Dweezil - preparing for an appearance at Frank Zappa At The Roundhouse, November's slightly early celebration in London of what would have been his sire's 70th birthday - he's quite candid about it all. 'I've never been concerned about the living-in-the-shadow syndrome,' he points out. 'If I was, I'd never have chosen to do a project called Zappa Plays Zappa!

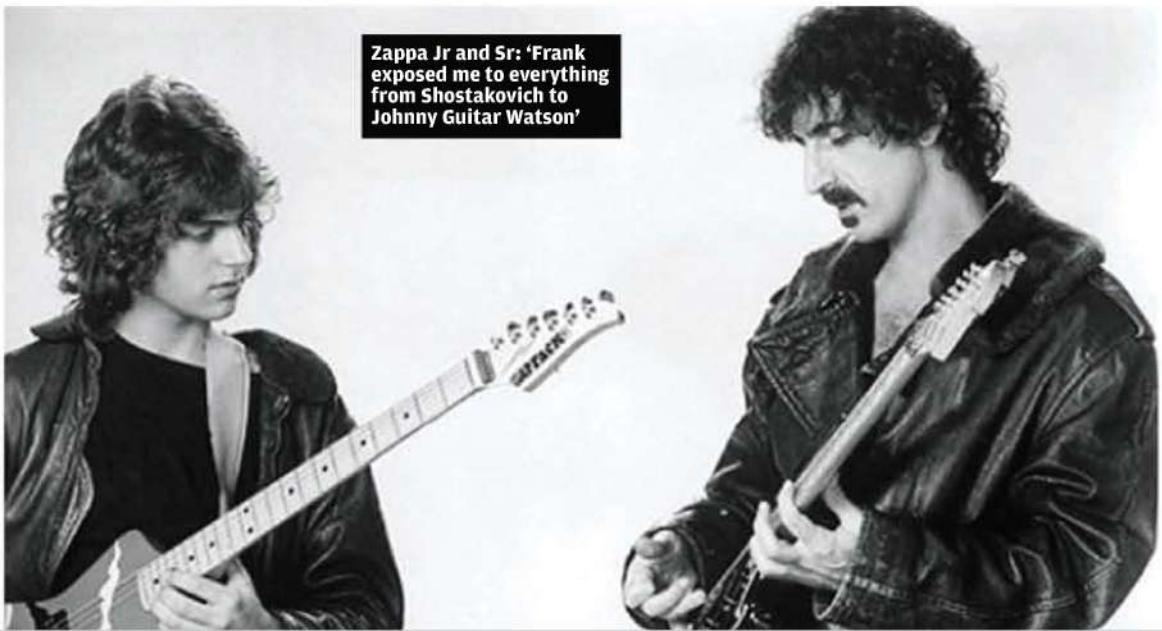
> *'Frank's music is ahead of its time, yet timeless. I want to share it with new generations'*

'It puts me in direct comparison with my dad. If people feel confident that what I do is at a commensurate level of what he did, then that's great. One thing is for sure: they'll always be able to recognise that my band works very hard, and we love what we do.

'Calling it a "tribute" is problematic because of the association with nostalgia, but Frank's music is both ahead of its time and timeless. I want to share it with new generations, and it helps to have a relatively youthful band performing it, dispelling the myth that only Frank's old alumni can play it correctly - though we've had guest appearances by some of them.

'We used to appeal mostly to core fans, mostly men over 50. It's more diverse now, a younger age group. We're also seeing a lot more women at our shows. We hardly saw any for the first couple of years.'

During the European leg of one such expedition in summer 2009, a standing-room-only recital at Bristol's Colston Hall flew by as quickly as reading the most page-turning thriller. Seeing Dweezil Zappa live, it's hard to avoid the thought that, even without any affinity to Frank, the 40-year-old might have still been acclaimed as a guitar hero. As capable of serene melody as severe dissonance, he displays both eclecticism and unpredictability, and is obviously tuned in to the aesthetics of a given number rather than merely reacting with high-velocity flash to basic chord sequences.



Zappa Jr and Sr: 'Frank exposed me to everything from Shostakovich to Johnny Guitar Watson'

Catalogue

DWEEZIL ZAPPA CONFESSIONS

Participants include Donny Osmond on *Stayin' Alive*, standing in for Ozzy Osbourne after the 'Sabbath mans effort was infamously pulled by his management

DWEEZIL ZAPPA GO WITH WHAT YOU KNOW

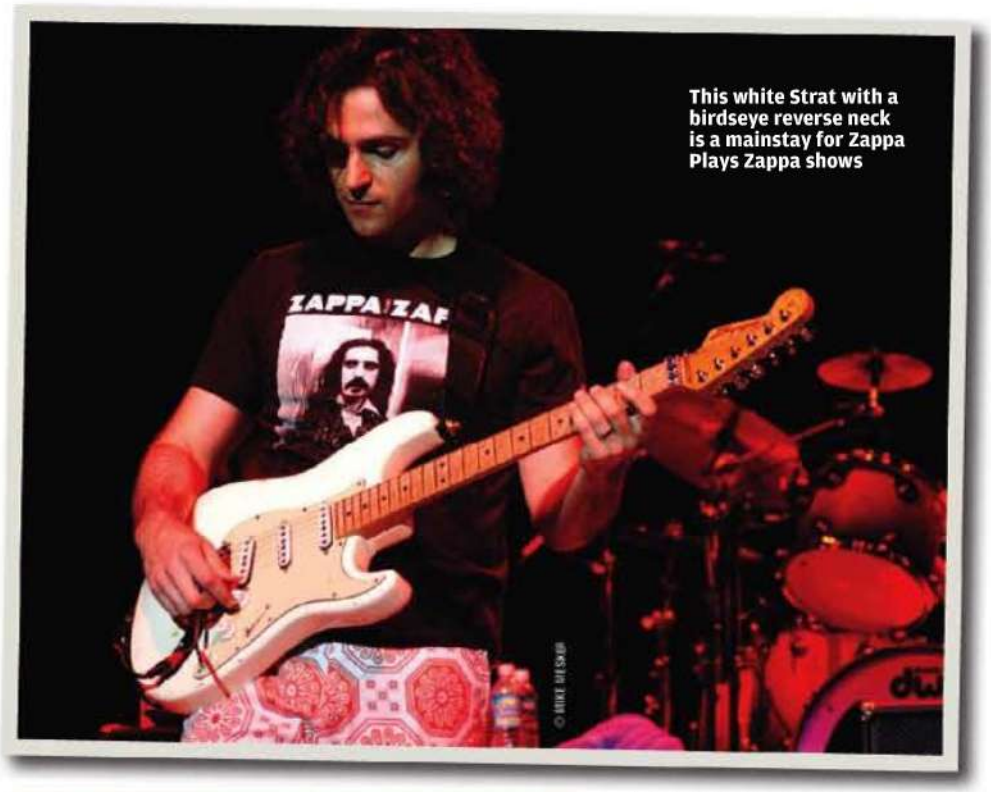
12 of 13 tracks are self-penned, notably *CC$* - 'written around a noise from an effects box plugged in improperly,' Dweezil reveals

DWEEZIL ZAPPA RETURN OF THE SON OF...

One highlight of this in-concert item from the Zappa Plays Zappa ensemble is *Bamboozled By Love*, derived from two existing Frank Zappa

Gear

Guitars: numerous Strats, a custom SG built to replicate Frank's Baby Snakes guitar, Music Man, Hagstrom Viking, one-off PRS, Eric Johnson Strat, Gibson Les Paul and ES-5 Switchmaster
Amps: various Cornfords, Peavey Wiggy, assorted Fender combos
Effects: Fractal Systems Axe-FX, Freekish Blues fuzzes and boosters, Eventide delay and harmoniser, Chandler delay, Afro Fuzz, Janglebox compressor and a good deal more besides



This white Strat with a birdseye reverse neck is a mainstay for Zappa Plays Zappa shows

'I might have more technical skill than my dad. I practise seven or eight hours a day'

'There are some really fast things and difficult rhythms in songs like *Inca Roads*, *The Black Page* and *G-Spot Tornado*,' Dweezil points out. 'We play them as they are on the recordings – except for the improvisational parts and, say, putting an ending on a song that fades out. I look at Frank's music as being an absolute. If you're going to play it, then you must respect the intent of the composer.'

Professional interest has confined much of Dweezil's listening to his father's output, but as a boy he was drawn to guitar-driven acts such as Van Halen and AC/DC... and Led Zeppelin, who prompted him to form Fred Zeppelin, a name that amused a parent who supported Dweezil's fancy that he'd like to be a musician too.

'Frank exposed me to lots of different stuff,' Dweezil says. 'Shostakovich to the Bulgarian Women's Choir to Johnny Guitar Watson. He also gave me guitar lessons, and taught me to read and write music. Nowadays I'm trying to become more knowledgeable about theory and harmonic approaches, but I probably have more technical skill than my dad as a guitarist. It's not uncommon for me to practice seven or eight hours a day, both on tour and off.'

Living close to Hollywood, Dweezil was well-placed to earn a living in film and TV – as an actor, voiceover artist and presenter – as well as music. He enjoyed bit-parts in flicks like Arnold Schwarzenegger's *The Running Man* and 1986's brat-pack vehicle *Pretty In Pink*, and has penned themes for such as Roseanne Barr's chat show. He's also an in-demand session guitarist, playing with the Fat Boys, 911, Don Johnson, Winger, Extreme, Weird Al Yankovic and the Dixie Dregs. 'The Johnson record was fun because I got to the studio right after Stevie Ray Vaughan was there. I was able to check his guitar and gear. I once played with him too – on stage with Herbie Hancock in New York.'

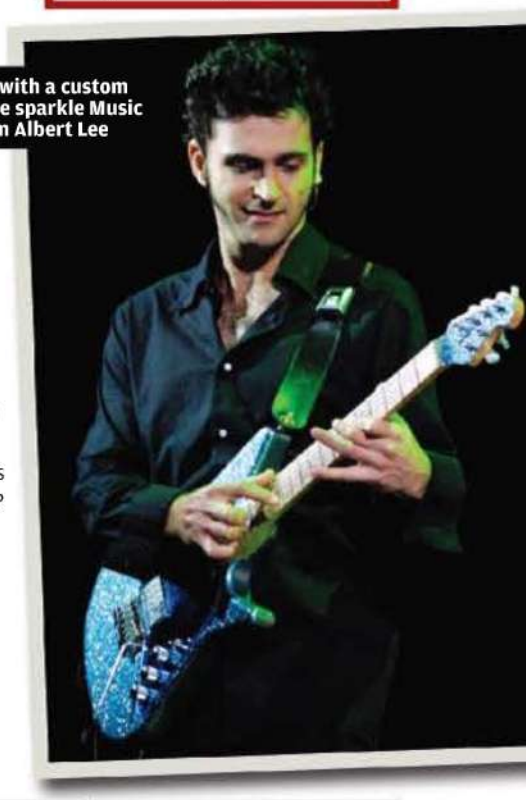
Vaughan's death in 1990 precluded his inclusion in *What The Hell Was I Thinking?* – Dweezil's now decade-long project designed to embrace contributions by dozens of guitarists (Eddie Van Halen, Brian May and Angus Young are already on tape). 'It's best described as an audio movie with constant scenes morphing into one another,' smiles Dweezil. 'It'll be pretty cool mixed in surround sound when it's finally done.'

Dweezilla Boot Camp

This June saw the first Dweezilla Music Boot Camp four-day residential tutorial. 'My band have such diversity in their approach to their instruments,' relates Dweezil, 'and it seemed a good idea to let musicians immerse themselves in learning from multiple angles. It was also a way to give back to a community that has supported us so well. There are concerts and nightly jams. One-on-one lessons are available, and some great communal meals!

'I especially like teaching novices. They have less to unlearn – it's amazing to watch them flourish quickly with fresh ideas. I remember quite vividly craving detailed information about techniques and how to get tones. Even now, I try to learn something new on a daily basis.

'My advice is to keep an open mind – and an open ear. Try to make a statement of your own, whether it's with notes, tone or personality in the execution. When it all comes together, something memorable and magical can happen.'



DZ with a custom blue sparkle Music Man Albert Lee

DID YOU KNOW?

- Dweezil has the Stratocaster given to Frank after being burned by Hendrix
- Zappa Plays Zappa won a Grammy for their recording of Peaches En Regalia
- Most of his guitars are fitted with switches to knock pickups out of phase
- Dweezil is cousin to actress Lala Sloatman (Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story)

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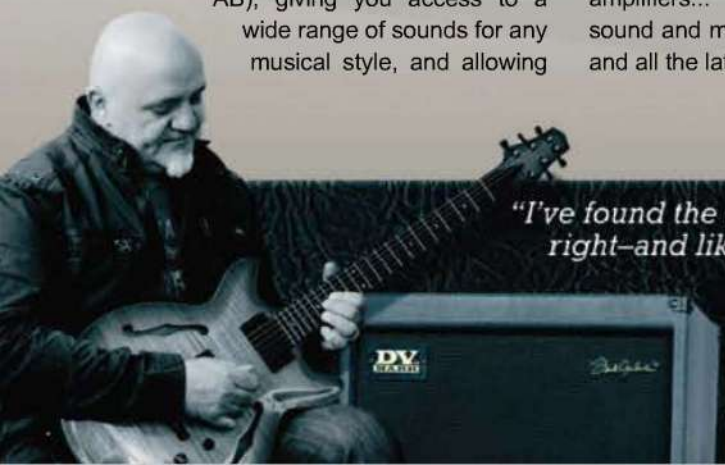

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C 212 V
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300W, 4 ohms

C 412 Standard
4x12", standard slant-top design; 21.4 kg / 47.1 lbs
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C 412 Vintage
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Harmony Central

Ian Siegal has just returned from recording in the sticky heat of North Mississippi. Steve Bailey joins the travelling bluesman to investigate his adoration of resonators and vintage Harmony guitars

From busking on the streets of Berlin to rising to the top of the blues charts in Holland and Belgium, Ian Siegal has found a lesser-trodden route to success as a British blues player. Sponsorship and government funding has meant a lucrative career on the Euro blues circuit – yet while Siegal has become a huge draw in a number of countries, he remains an enigma to many at home.

As a frontman Siegal can evoke Howlin' Wolf with spine-tingling accuracy and switch to gut-busting soul at the drop of a hat, while his muscular, evocative guitar work has been a revelation on his albums *Broadside* and *The Dust*. It's no surprise, then, to discover that his affinity with the blues stretches back to his teens, when he discovered the music of Charlie Patton, Muddy Waters and BB King.

'It always makes me laugh when someone says "How come someone your age is into all this old blues stuff?"' Siegal scoffs. 'Well, I had a CD player, and there are record shops. It's not that hard! You don't have to be born in the 18th century to listen to Mozart, do you?'

He took his first steps on stage with his cousin's Portsmouth-based pub duo, Talking Sheep, but he's convinced that six months spent playing for coins on the streets of Berlin were more pivotal to his performing career.

'I learned a lot very, very fast. This was around 1989 or 1990, just after the Wall came down. It was 24 hour partying in those days. I don't want to over-dramatise it because I wasn't living on the streets, but it was a great education as a musician to have to play well simply to eat.'

The Berlin streets weren't a free-for-all, either: musicians had to tread very carefully as a group of hard-nosed Polish buskers had already moved in and got themselves organised. 'It was like a busking mafia. Seriously! They would beat you up if you took the good spots. You had to cherrypick whatever was left.'

Siegal's stash: all made by Harmony except a custom built Broadcaster, a 1970 Yamaha FG150 acoustic, a new National and a Vintage mando

'It always makes me laugh when people say "How come someone your age is into all this old blues?" I had a CD player!'

Pink Floyd and the Beatles earned the most coinage from the German public, so it wasn't until Ian returned to Blighty that he really honed his jukejoint-style stagecraft. He spent five years playing on the Nottingham blues scene, which revolved around the famous Running Horse venue, and moved back down to London just in time to join the legendary jams at the Weavers Arms in Stoke Newington at their peak around the mid-1990s. These nights cemented many friendships that are still strong to this day; Ian joined harp player Lee Sankey's band for a time, and budding six-string star Matt Schofield produced and played on Siegal's early albums *Meat And Potatoes*, *Swagger* and *Broadside*. 'Matt was just a kid,' recalls Ian. 'He used to drive down from Gloucestershire or wherever and blow everyone away... at just 18, he was one of the most mature guitar players I've ever heard. It's frightening. Every time I see him, he's cranked it up another notch.'

Schofield played progressively less and less on Siegal's work, trying to encourage him to put his own soulful fretwork

Catalogue

IAN SIEGAL
MEAT AND POTATOES (2005)

The raw, stripped down sound that got Siegal noticed started here, and his songwriting really began to shine through. Matt Schofield plays and produces

IAN SIEGAL
THE DUST (2008)

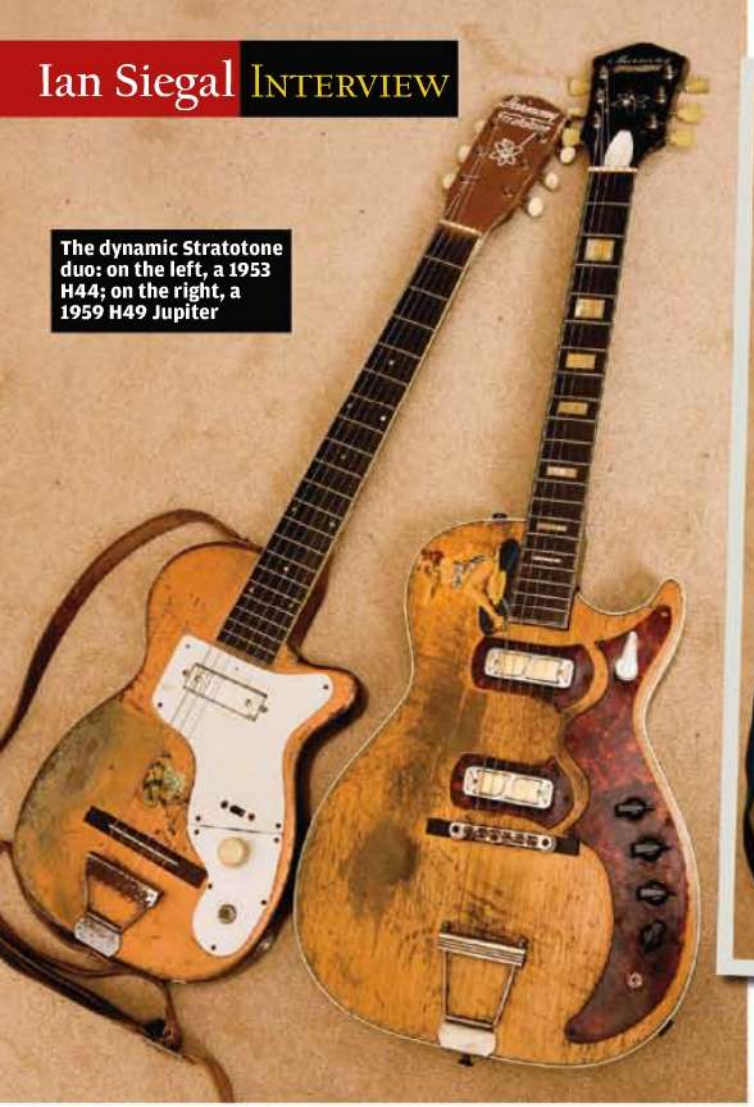
A more country tinged effort with a guest slot from BJ Cole on pedal steel. Extra live tracks showcase Siegal's astounding Howlin' Wolf impression

IAN SIEGAL
BROADSIDE (2009)

The breakthrough that earned the title Best Blues Album Of The Year from one of the country's biggest music mags. Siegal's own guitar playing shines through more than ever

Gear

Electrics: Harmonys – 1953 H44 Stratotone, 1959 H49 Jupiter Stratotone, 1959/'60 Hollywood archtop. Custom built Broadcaster replica
Acoustics: 1969 H1266 Harmony Sovereign, 1970 Yamaha FG150, '60s Stella. 1929 National Triolian and 1930s reissue National
Amps: 1967 Fender blackface Vibrolux with middle control mod added at the rear
Effects: Durham Sex Drive clean boost



The dynamic Stratotone duo: on the left, a 1953 H44; on the right, a 1959 H49 Jupiter

A recent addition: a 1963 H19 Silhouette, regarded as the finest Harmony solidbody

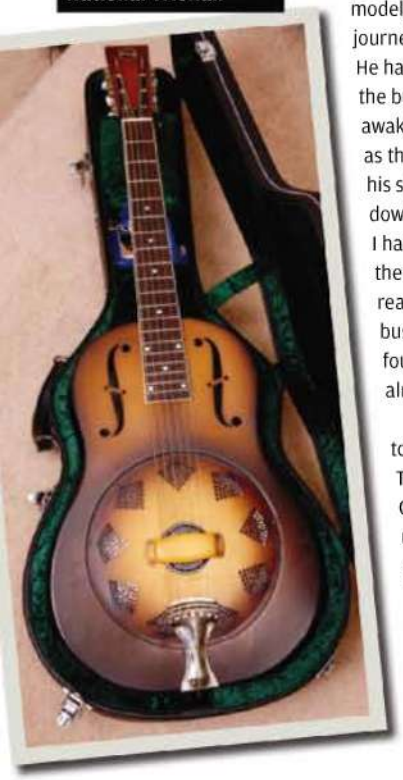
front and centre. 'If Matt's around I'd usually rather let him play because anything I can do he can do better, but he's always been very kind about my guitar playing.'

Ian has always loved National steel guitars, though he's not always had the best of luck with them. His first, a 1950s model, fell victim to the journey home from a gig. He had fallen asleep on the bus home and, on awaking, leapt off just as the bus pulled in at his stop. 'I was walking down the street thinking "I'm sure I had something with me," then there was a horrible moment of realisation. I rushed up to the bus garage which was only about four stops up the road, but it had already gone.'

A friend heard of his plight and told Ian about a 1929 National Triolian on sale for only $900 in Chicago. Siegal bought it sight unseen: 'I just phoned them up and said "I'll have that, please." The neck had to be reset and it needed the cone replacing, but it was still well worth it. Almost all the slide guitar you hear on *The Dust* is that National.'

However, ever since a nasty incident during an Easyjet flight, the Triolian has been retired from the road. 'They made me put the guitar in the hold, even though it was my only hand luggage! I opened up the case about half an hour before going on stage to support Lucinda Williams, and the neck was just hanging off. It's been repaired, but it's never really been quite the same since.'

A walnut-burst reissue of the 1930s W-series National Triolian



'The Harmonys have an amazing, big, thick sound. The little H44 Stratotone sustains forever, it's just ridiculous'

Fortunately, National themselves have come to the rescue with an endorsement deal. 'They're making guitars that are closer to the originals than ever before. The metal is thinner, just like it used to be, which I think makes them more resonant. My 1930s reissue W-Series Triolian is up there with my old '29. It's certainly the best modern resonator I've played.

'Normally I have the resonator tuned to open D or open G. To me they don't really enjoy standard tuning. These guitars respond better to heavy strings, I use .015" to .058", and the harder you hit them the more you get out of 'em.'

Siegal often plays solo, but he has built his reputation gigging with his electric band with Nikolaj Bjerre on drums and Andy Graham on bass. He believes his arsenal of old Harmony guitars give him a real edge. He first heard the power of these guitars when he toured on a bill with Dutch guitar ace Mischa Den Haring of T99. Mischa played an H44 model, and Ian just had to have one.

'It's not so much to do with the guitars as with the DeArmond pickups,' he explains. 'Players like Ry Cooder and Michael Messer will say the thing to do is to rip the pickups off of old Teiscos, Harmonys and Silvertones then fit them to a high-grade guitar like a Strat or a Tele, so you're not dealing with the crappy Harmony parts, which on the cheaper models do tend to fall apart... but I think you lose a bit of character.'

The Harmonys that invariably accompany Ian on the road are a twin-pickup solidbody H49 Stratotone Jupiter Deluxe and his main electric slide guitar, a tiny '53 Stratotone. 'They have an amazing, big thick sound. The '53 sustains forever, it's just ridiculous. If you put a Strat or a Tele through an amp then stick either of these two through at the same settings, you get about double the volume - the pickups are very, very powerful.'

Less than five years ago Harmonys were changing hands for only a couple of hundred pounds, but interest has risen and prices have inflated. 'They're now going for silly money. Mine have probably gone down in value because they've all been modernised! What most pro players do is replace the wooden bridge and the tuners. Mine have

Harmony Hollywood archtop fitted with replacement pickups

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Ian with his late-'60s Harmony Sovereign Deluxe model H1266

Right: a Harmony-made Stella H929 with a DeArmond soundhole pickup

'The Harmony Sovereign acoustic is every bit as good as most Gibsons I've played. It sounds amazing in the studio'

tun-o-matics but I've heard Rickenbacker bridges are better because they're slightly narrower.' He's also had the Jupiter's strange switching rewired to be more like a Gibson. 'It decreases its value as a collector's item, but it makes it a better gigging guitar.'

Another benefit is the weight - or rather the lack of it. 'I put them together in one gig bag, and the weight of the two is the same as the weight of a Strat. It's perfect for travelling.'

He's just found himself a very useful backup, a Harmony H19, regarded as the best solidbody the company ever made. 'It's a '63, the first year of production, with the "double moustache" pickups set at an angle. They became less well built a couple of years later when they squared off the pickups. I got lucky - this is one of the really valuable ones. It's got a Hagstrom tremolo but the arm has broken off and it's just impossible to find one. I've even contacted Hagstrom in Sweden, but they couldn't help. I'll have to see if I can get a new one made.'

Acoustically, the guitar that has helped Siegal recreate authentic Delta tones is his old Stella. 'I heard about old Stellas being the bluesman's choice, or at least what they could afford, and this is a lovely thing. With new strings it sounds almost like a resonator - loud, powerful, tight and middley.

'I fitted an old vintage DeArmond soundhole pickup just like the ones Lightnin' Hopkins and Elmore James used to use. They sound incredible - loud in a sort of boxy, bluesy way, and through an amp they sound enormous. It's an early one because there's no polepiece on the B string, and apparently that means it's a good one. It's very well balanced but it doesn't really sound like an acoustic guitar - and you have to have nickel strings, it just won't pick up bronze ones properly.'

Ian's Harmony Hollywood archtop is from around 1959 or '60 and he's very pleased to have back from the repairer. 'It's a real blues beast, and great amplified. They're not the original pickups, but they're the same DeArmond Goldtones as the originals would have been. I used it acoustically on a couple of songs on an album called *Swagger*.'

The Stella, the Hollywood and a '70/'71 Yamaha FG150 have recently been ousted by his latest acoustic purchase, a Harmony Sovereign 1266. 'It's a deluxe version of the guitar that Jimmy Page used on *Stairway To Heaven* - fancier, with double pickguards and stuff, but essentially the same guitar. It's every bit as good as most of Gibsons I've played. I've been recording out in Mississippi at the Zebra Ranch Studio in Holly Springs and I picked it up while I was out there. It sounded amazing in the studio.'

Zebra Ranch was owned by Jim Dickinson, a legendary producer from those parts, and the place is now run by his sons Cody and Luther from the North Mississippi Allstars. 'Cody was producing, and we recorded with a bunch of local musicians from the area - I can't name names yet, but some impressive people.'

The album remains unnamed and a bit hush-hush, but it promises great things. 'We recorded very fast in about three or four days. I wrote the whole thing in the space of a couple of weeks and we just kept it really raw, North Mississippi style. That's how I like to work. It was 110 degrees! It's a very inspiring place.'

Ian has no intention of 'upgrading' from his treasured Harmonys. In fact, he's found himself a top-of-the-range Harmony H75 thinline semi, and delivery is imminent. 'It's got three of those moustache Goldtone DeArmonds, and it looks the business,' he enthuses. 'I've seen some really serious session players with them. Okay, you probably wouldn't want to use these guitars if you're a jazzer or a session pop player, but for rootsy music they're great. They just have that certain wonderfully authentic '50s and '60s sound, and for what I do they're perfect.'

DID YOU KNOW?

- His real name is Berry. Mr Siegal was his band – named after a Tom Waits song
- Ian tours with the Jazz Orchestra of France, singing reworked Billie Holiday songs
- Big Bill Morganfield on Ian: 'If my daddy [Muddy Waters] were alive today he'd say "That's my boy!"'
- Ian was introduced to Harmonys by guitarist Mischa Den Haring of T99

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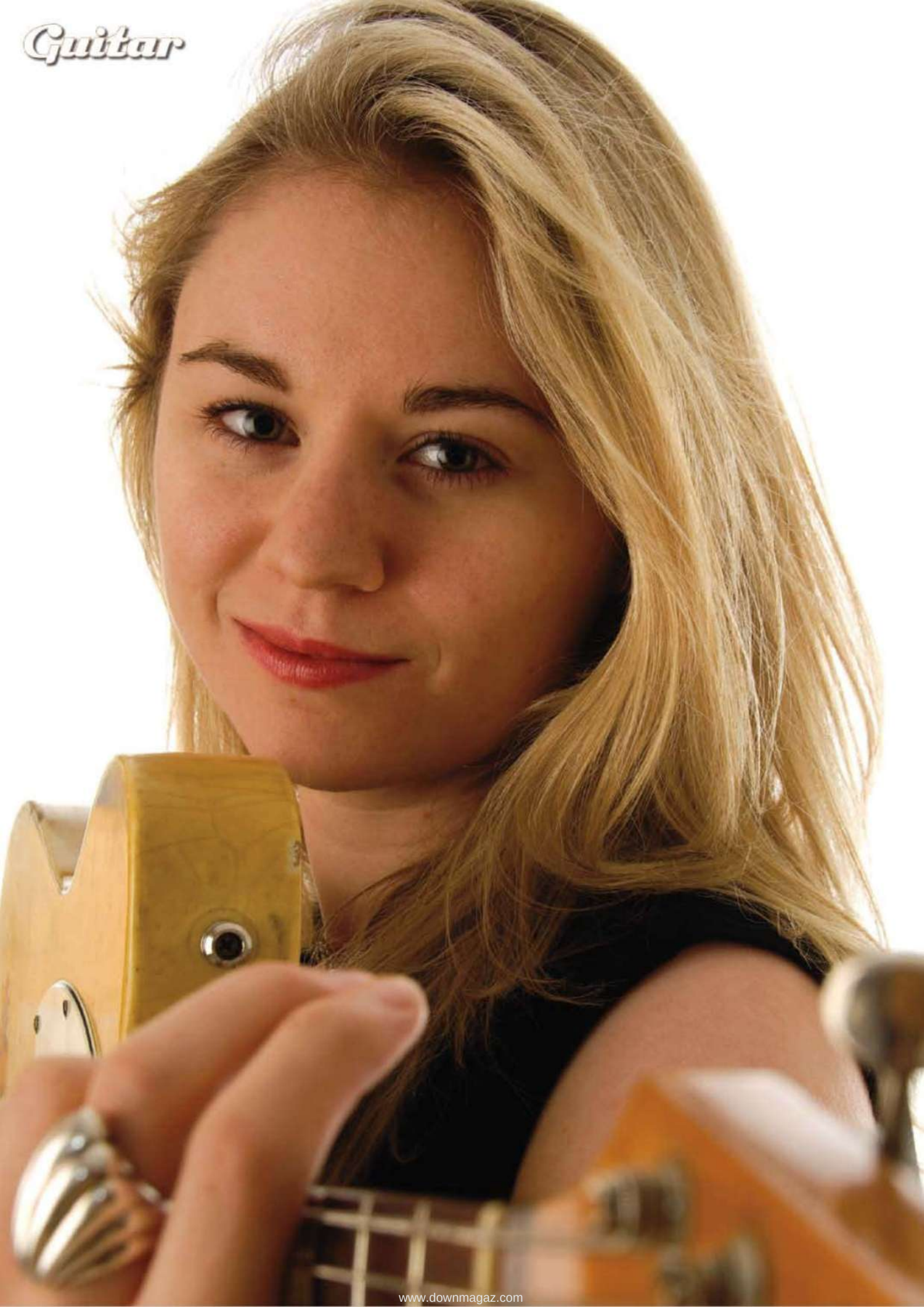

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Young Gifted & Blue

Though Joanne Shaw Taylor's playing has hints of Stevie Ray, Albert Collins and the Paladins, she's got a writing style and a hard, driving guitar edge that's all her own. Interview by Julian Piper

From the moment Joanne Shaw Taylor hits the stage, head down and wrenching out a Texas shuffle on her battered, yellowed Fender Esquire, she plays as if her life depends on it, spitting out her songs and guitar licks as if she's hellbent on invoking the spirits of the blues gods. So when her first album *White Sugar* was released just over a year ago, it took many by surprise. Rather than being an excuse for a Tube Screamer meltdown, self-penned songs like *Just Another Word* and *Going Home* owed more to Curtis Mayfield than Buddy Guy and proved that Joanne was far from a one-trick pony.

Now her new album *Diamonds In The Dirt* again marks a significant step forward. Recorded with the crack *White Sugar* team - Jonny Lang studio veterans Steve Potts on drums and bassist Dave Smith, along with producer Jim Gaines - the SRV references in her guitar playing have been replaced by a hard-assed rock edge, and there's a new-found maturity in the 10 self-penned songs.

'All the songs are autobiographical,' Taylor tells *G&B*. 'It's my opportunity to put thoughts and fears to paper. In blues-rock the song has become devalued, but when you think back to great writers like Robert Johnson or Willie Dixon, that's a huge shame. Those guys were always trying to tell a story. I was consciously trying to come up with better songs, and I put the guitar in a more supporting role.'

Most of the last year has been spent touring America. 'There's so much work over there,' she says, 'and also, my bassist Paul Lamb and drummer Layla Hall come from Detroit. We started at the end of last year, then in February it really kicked off and we played most of the east coast, the midwest and went as far down as Texas. This summer we've been busy with festivals like Telluride Blues in Colorado and Memphis In May, some of which have been brilliant. It's such a big country, and audiences there are probably more diverse in terms of the age group.'

'I love the freedom of playing blues. It's disciplined in the same way as classical guitar, but a lot more liberating'

Joanne began playing classical guitar when she was eight before undergoing her blues epiphany five years later. 'I love the freedom of expression in playing blues. It's disciplined in the same way as classical guitar, but a lot more liberating.'

From an outsider's perspective, her career since could have seemed erratic. Aged just 16, she was taken under the musical wing of Dave Stewart of Eurythmics fame, and found herself playing large concert stages throughout Europe. 'I was so young, and had only been playing guitar for three years and singing for six months. I think if you're expected to be able to perform, something like that is a great learning curve. Suddenly I was playing a lot of shows, and found myself working with Dave, Jimmy Cliff and Candy Dulfer. It was an unusual mix, but I certainly got an education in different styles.'

Joanne recorded with Dave Stewart, but due to management problems the album was never released. The next few years saw her gigging periodically, but despite the acclaim of audiences at her live shows she seemed to be biding her time when it came to studio work. 'I kept performing, but took a break from recording because I didn't want to rush into anything,' she explains. 'Most of the major labels didn't have much interest in roots-based music, and I was very conscious of my age. I didn't want to release an album that

Catalogue

JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR WHITE SUGAR

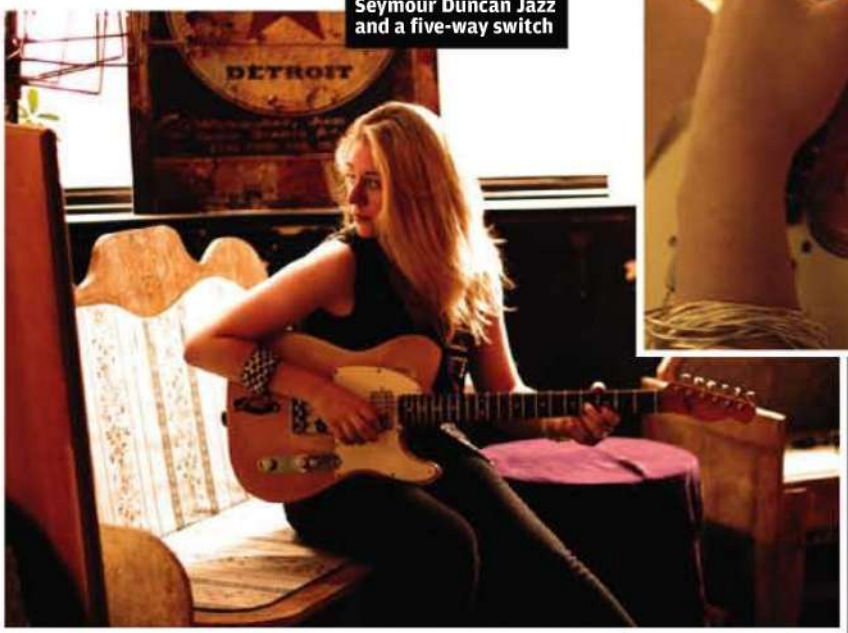
Joanne's long-awaited debut, a fiery mix of SRV influenced blues tempered with soulful tracks that are a hint of greater things to come

JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR DIAMONDS IN THE DUST

Sparkling original songs and Joanne's rock edged guitar prove she's got star quality

Gear

Guitars: 1966 Fender Esquire with Seymour Duncan Jazz at the neck and .011" strings, Fender Stratocaster
Amps: Fender Bassman, Marshall 100W top and cab
Effects: Ibanez TS9 Tube Screamer, TwinStomp boost pedal



Joanne's '66 Fender Esquire has an added Seymour Duncan Jazz and a five-way switch

Joanne Shaw Taylor on stage at London's Shepherds Bush Empire, May 23, 2009

Photo: Harry Herd/Getty Images

would make people say "It's good for her age" or "Good for a girl". I wanted to wait until I felt capable of making a really good album. Live shows come and go in a minute, but an album is much more of a statement. I didn't want to look back in 10 years and think I could have made it that much better. I'm glad I waited - but I was only 22 when I did *White Sugar*, which is still quite young for a debut album.'

The blues guitar world does seem to have been attracting more women in recent years - Sue Foley, Laura Chavez, Debbie Davies, Susan Tedeschi - but Joanne is ambivalent about how she's perceived. 'I think it helps in some ways to be female, and in the early days it was a bit of a foot in the door, but at the same time some people wouldn't give me gigs,' she snorts. 'They'd say "She's female, she can't really play," and I still get people coming to my shows who just want to compare me to other female guitar players, even though we may have nothing else in common!

'I hope that at some point people will accept that there are quite a few female guitarists... and maybe they should compare us to the men! All my influences are male and I like to think that I play with as much ferocity as anyone, regardless of their sex. If I don't stack up as a performer, that's another thing - maybe it's because I'm not as entertaining as some male guitarists, but that has nothing to do with my being female.'

'I didn't want to release an album that made people say "Good for her age" or "Good for a girl". I'm glad I waited'

With major shows coming up supporting Joe Bonamassa's Black Country Communion, Joanne's quick to dispel any notion that her music's rooted in any 12-bar shuffle fixation. 'I never thought of myself as a blues player,' she says. 'There's always been a great deal of blues in my playing, but coming from the Black Country I've always been more drawn to bands like Deep Purple, Sabbath and Led Zeppelin. I've always been rocky and aggressive in my playing.'

DID YOU KNOW?

- Joanne's a big fan of the Hoax, and appeared at their reunion show
- Her song Kiss The Ground Goodbye is the story of her music business let-downs
- She was nominated for the prestigious Memphis Blues Awards of 2010
- She played with RL Burnside in the film Deep Blues In Mississippi

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AS-17-21-SF jazz guitar ~~£1395~~ £1195
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Yairi:
AS-17-21 SF jazz guitar ~~£1795~~ £1795
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Yairi CY40 £1595 (left)
Burguet AC 2200 (right)

Classical
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Gibson
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Price: £3227

Translating approximately to Little Bastard Special, La Cabronita Especial is Fender's Custom Shop brawler, a Tele with extra Gretsch horsepower. Review by Rick Batey

Fender

La Cabronita Especial

As soon as we saw the first La Cabronita – which emerged in single-pickup form sometime in 2008 before gaining a twin-pickup sister – we thought it was one of the most exciting guitars to emerge from the Fender Custom Shop in some time. Blending Fender features from various eras with a hefty dollop of Gretschiness, it's the company's way of showing they're just as hip and up-to-the-minute as all the boutique builders who adopt the Telecaster format, refine it and beef it up with P90s, mini-buckers or Filtertrons.

Forget about strict vintage, though that's a big part of the Custom Shop's stock-in-trade: this is a hotrod guitar built with an open-minded mix-and-match ethic, and it's designed for go as well as show. Fender begins with a solid alder body, routed to old-time specs with square edges and a router hump in the cutaway. At a shade under 8lbs it's a few ounces over our desert island Tele weight, but it hangs super-solidly on a strap. The shade of the sonic blue nitro finish is a marvel of subtlety, not too bright nor too blue, but a mellow, greyish hue set off by an aged parchment scratchplate. Around the back there's a control access plate, again in off-white plastic, shaped like a strip with rounded ends – a nice stylistic echo of the traditional Tele control plate.

Fender's relicing work on the body includes forearm wear, edge chips, ultra-fine overall crazing, some tummy-rub and a large wear patch in the belt-buckle position. There's some heavy scoring on the back that displays the common syndrome of the relic'er using only one implement instead of several, but overall it's a good effort. It's a slightly mixed bag with the neck aging: the yellowed colour of the nitro lacquer is really superb and we've grown accustomed to this style of maple 'fingerboard wear' patches, but the strong dark shading surrounding each and every fret doesn't really look like genuine finger-gunk or sweat-seepage, and we'd probably prefer it without.

The neck itself is a corker. With a deep C profile, it's slimmer than a Nocaster but much beefier than a '60s reissue; the 9.5" radius and wider, taller Dunlop 6105 frets make it a clever combo of mid-'50s heft and modern bendability. The neck pocket gaps look tight but fail the Rizla test, which is a let-down, but with the excellent set-up it's a fast, smooth playing experience.

The modern stainless-saddle bridge is a surprise, but it's super-solid and it doesn't impede the picking hand

The Classics are TV Jones' low-wind Filter'Trons. The single pickup Cabronita has a pokier Power'Tron

Forget all about strict vintage: this is a hotrod built with an open-minded mix-and-match ethic, and it's built for go as well as show

FACTFILE

LA CABRONITA ESPECIAL

Description: Solidbody electric guitar. Made in US

Price: £3227 with hard case

Build: Alder body and bolt-on maple neck

Hardware: Two TV Jones Classic Filter'Trons, Sperzel tuners, hardtail bridge with chromed brass baseplate and stainless steel saddles, vintage-style cup output socket, one volume control with S-1 switch and Greasebucket circuitry, three-way toggle pickup selectors

Left-Handers: No

Finish: Aged sonic blue (as reviewed) or aged candy apple red

Scale length: 647mm/25.5"

Neck width:
Nut 42mm
12th fret 52mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 22mm
12th fret 24mm

String spacing:
Nut 35mm
Bridge 52mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 1.4mm
12th fret bass 1.8mm

Weight: 3.54kg/7.8lb

Contact: Fender
01342 331700
www.fender.com

THE COMPETITION

DENNIS FANO
Alt de Facto TC6

New York-built pre-aged custom guitar range including righteous T-style models with a TV Jones option and cool vintage detailing. Importing is not cheap, but this is a maker with a fervent following

PRICE: from $2500

ETERNAL
Dennis

We reviewed the Micawber and the Hollow Blonde last month, but Eternal of the UK also do a fab Esquire tribute with a '50s decal, mini scratchplate and aged everything. They'll make a double Filter'Tron version for you with no problem at all

PRICE: FROM £1600

CRESTON GUITARS
Custom

Made one at a time in Vermont, Creston guitars are much admired by the alt-country rock crowd. They do a delicious line in custom-painted sugar pine T-types, and Filter'Trons are a popular option. Absolutely no relics, and one-off orders only

PRICE: from $2000

Up at the headstock we find a single '50s-style round string tree and a sudden, surprising jolt of modernity in the form of a tight, efficient set of Sperzels with pearloid buttons. The bridge is another contemporary touch: it's a US Standard Strat-type hardtail unit with a chromed brass baseplate and rectangular stainless steel saddles. You can't fault it for practicality, but we might have chosen a chopped-off ashtray - like the one on the GE Smith Tele - with three staggered saddles... better suited, some might argue, to a relic Tele.

Finally we have a pair of pickups provided by the best-regarded of all Gretsch retro-fit gurus, TV Jones, and the controls are a simple knurled knob for volume (with a secret S-1 switch on the top, of which more later) and a three-way toggle giving pickups 1, 1&2 and 2.

SOUNDS

While Teles and humbuckers are both undisputed greats, a marriage between them is not always an easy one. The most impressive thing about La Cabronita is that, astonishingly, it still sounds like a Telecaster. Articulate yet attacking, these Classics could be the perfect humbuckers for single-coil fans. Through a silverface Champ below 4 they're pure enough for country, but moved up to 6 - the point at which a regular Tele would still be fairly clean - they're edgy and growly. Trad tele fans won't find true twang, but there's real bite and boinginess on tap here. The neck pickup is rich, the middle position poppy, the bridge much, more edgy and committed. It's a hairy one.

Dab the top of the volume knob and the Cabronita slips into Greasebucket mode. At first we missed having a regular tone pot, but the S-1 is fast (though not as fast as a sprung push-push pot would be). The system replaces the standard single polyester tone cap with two ceramic caps (.100uf and .02uf) and a metal film resistor, and it's designed to kill treble without adding bass or cutting gain.

It works differently on all three settings. On the neck pickup, there's a little top-end roll-off; in the middle it has a stronger effect, a mellow, jazzy tonality; on the bridge it gives a choked, blocky sound a little like a half-cocked wah. Useful enough on a clean setting, these settings step into their own with overdrive, acquiring a stuffed-nose squonk that works on anything from gnarly Billy Gibbons to Buddy Miller's trademark pawnshop tremolo blues. It's also good for laying heavy distorted lines back in the mix, and with a touch of the S-1 you're back to the Cabronita's open-voiced *braaang*.

The sonic blue nitro and the shaping of the alder body are impressively vintage

With its delicious neck and the grumble and grind of those Filtertrons this is a decadent, rakish, bar-hopping sleazebag of an electric guitar

The Sperzels contrast sharply with the aged fingerboard and rusty string tree

VERDICT

We think La Cabronita Especial is a stone cold winner. The RRP is very serious, but the street price is justifiable if this was your #1 guitar - and it easily could be. If this was our own custom order we might spec it slightly differently, but as it is it combines the bare-bones Tele approach with edge and power in a compelling way. With its delicious medium handful of a neck, that evocative sonic blue finish, the TV Jones shimmer and the Greasebucket grumble and grind, it's a decadent, rakish, bar-hopping sleazebag of an electric guitar. Even though it'll probably empty your fridge and then steal your car, you just can't help but admire its style.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	17/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	15/20
Vibe	18/20
TOTAL	**86%**

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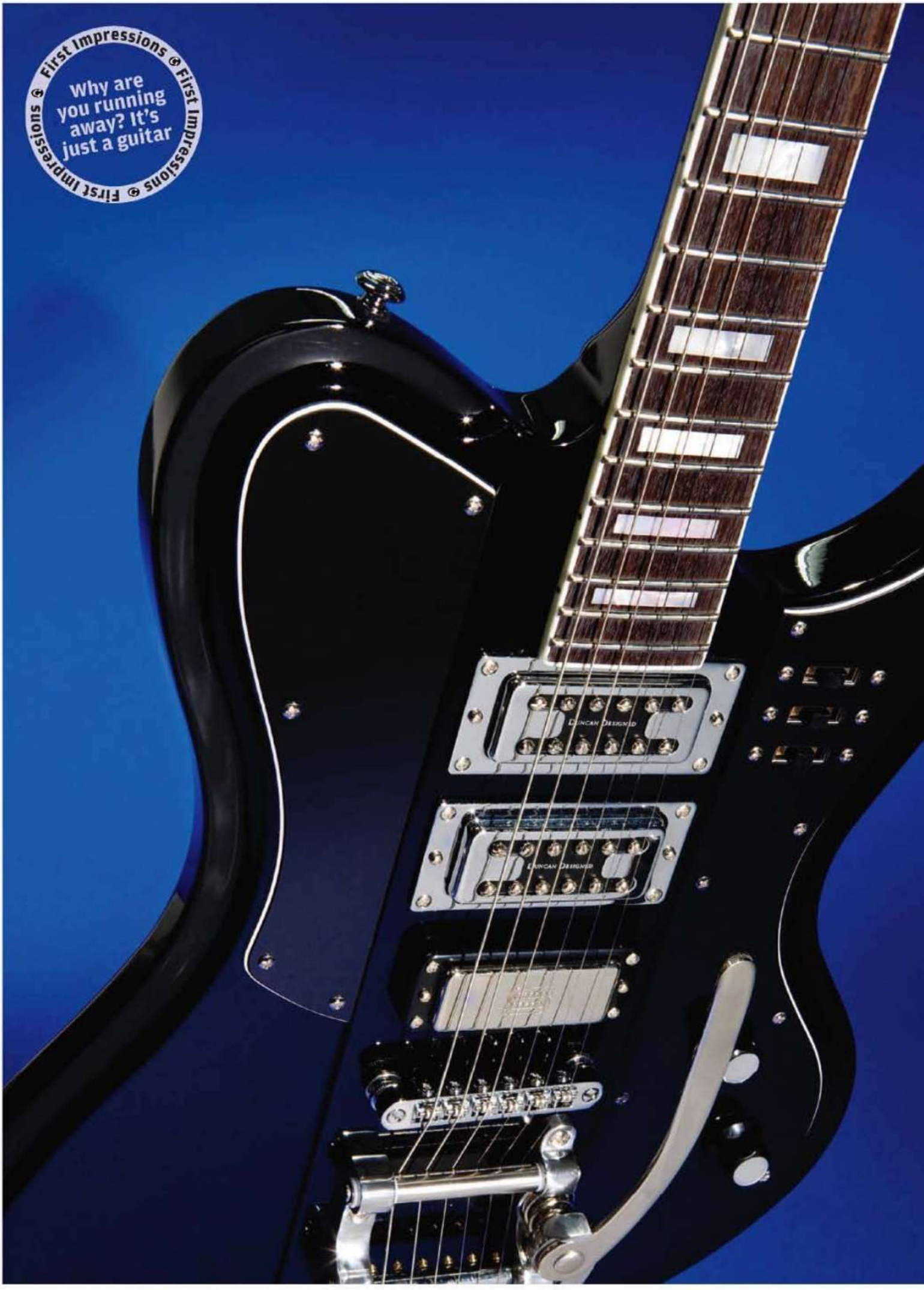


www.downmagaz.com

Price: £899

Cross a Firebird with a Tele with a Jaguar with a Corvette with a Teisco and you just might get something like this new signature for Robin Finck of GN'R/NIN. Review: Richard Purvis

Schecter

Robin Finck Ultra

When Dr Frankenstein had finished assembling his ungodly creation, he had to summon the power of the heavens to galvanise the beast into life. When Schecter built the Robin Finck Ultra, they just plugged it into an amp. It is a bit of a monster, though, don't you think? Shaped like the ungainly offspring of a Telecaster and a Mosrite, it has two Gretsch-type pickups plus one mini-humbucker, three Jaguar-style slider switches, a Bigsby vibrato and a headstock the size of Cuba.

Luckily for Schecter, there are some of us who think odd guitars are pretty cool... and if this thing really does combine all the best aspects of half a dozen classic guitars, reservations about its irregular appearance will quickly be forgotten.

First let's have a word about Mr Finck, as it's his signature guitar. Guns N'Roses and Nine Inch Nails are the big names on his CV. He's most often seen with a Les Paul - yes, the most conventional rock axe you can buy - so you have to wonder what he was on when Schecter phoned. The good news for non-Finck fans is that the initials 'RF' on the trussrod cover are the only sign of his involvement - there are no silly graphics to put off the casual punter.

This is a weighty chunk of mahogany with a Firebird-esque raised centre section and a subtle German carve around the edges. It's surprising to see a Bigsby on a hard rocker's guitar; the B50 may be a Far Eastern unit made under licence but it's a reliable piece of kit and will cater to all your wobbling needs, with tuning stability assisted by the tune-o-matic's roller saddles. Divebombing's out, though. The neck is neither especially wide nor deep, but the lacquer is thick and the frets are whoppers, so the Ultra feels a touch clunky and uninspiring to play. It's also extremely neck-heavy, thanks in part to that absurdly oversized headstock... and let's not even discuss the practicality of the 2+4 tuner arrangement.

Now, on to the important sonic details. It's got a set neck but a Fender scale length, and the pickups can all be coil-tapped, so we're probably in for some spiky highs despite the all-mahogany build, not least from the hot mini-humbucker at the bridge. The other two are FilterTron types, so that should hike up the twang factor with a little help from the Bigsby. All in all, it's hard to know quite what to expect from this thing.

The Finck Ultra's headstock is a copy of a '60s 4+2 Teisco - but reversed, just to make things even weirder

Though the construction is all-mahogany and the neck is glued, the scale is a long and Fenderish 25.6"

Shaped like the ungainly offspring of a Tele and a Mosrite, the Finck has three slider switches, a Bigsby and a headstock the size of Cuba

FACTFILE

ROBIN FINCK ULTRA

Description: Solidbody electric guitar. Made in Korea

Price: £899

Build: Mahogany body, set three-piece mahogany neck, 22-fret rosewood fingerboard, Bigsby-licensed B50 vibrato with roller bridge, Grover tuners

Electrics: Seymour Duncan SM-3 mini-humbucker at the bridge, Duncan Designed FG-101 humbuckers at middle and bridge, three on/off/coil-tap slider switches, master volume and tone

Left-handers: No

Finishes: Black, red

Scale length: 650mm/25.6"

Neck width:
Nut 41mm
12th fret 51mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 20mm
12th fret 22mm

String spacing:
Nut 34mm
Bridge 51mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 1.5mm
12th fret bass 1.5mm

Weight: 3.7kg/8.14lbs

Contact:
Westside Distribution
0141 248 4812
www.schecterguitars.com

THE COMPETITION

FENDER
J5 Triple Tele Deluxe

Based on the John 5 signature Telecaster, this version has three souped-up Wide Range humbuckers and a Stratocaster-type vibrato

RRP: £891

IBANEZ
NDM2

Offspring chugger Kevin 'Noodles' Wasserman has a signature Ibanez with HSH pickup configuration and a slightly Toytown look

RRP: £505

MANSON
MB-1 Standard

Best of luck getting hold of one of these limited-run Matt Bellamy models... and the MIDI control screen is £300 extra

RRP: £3099

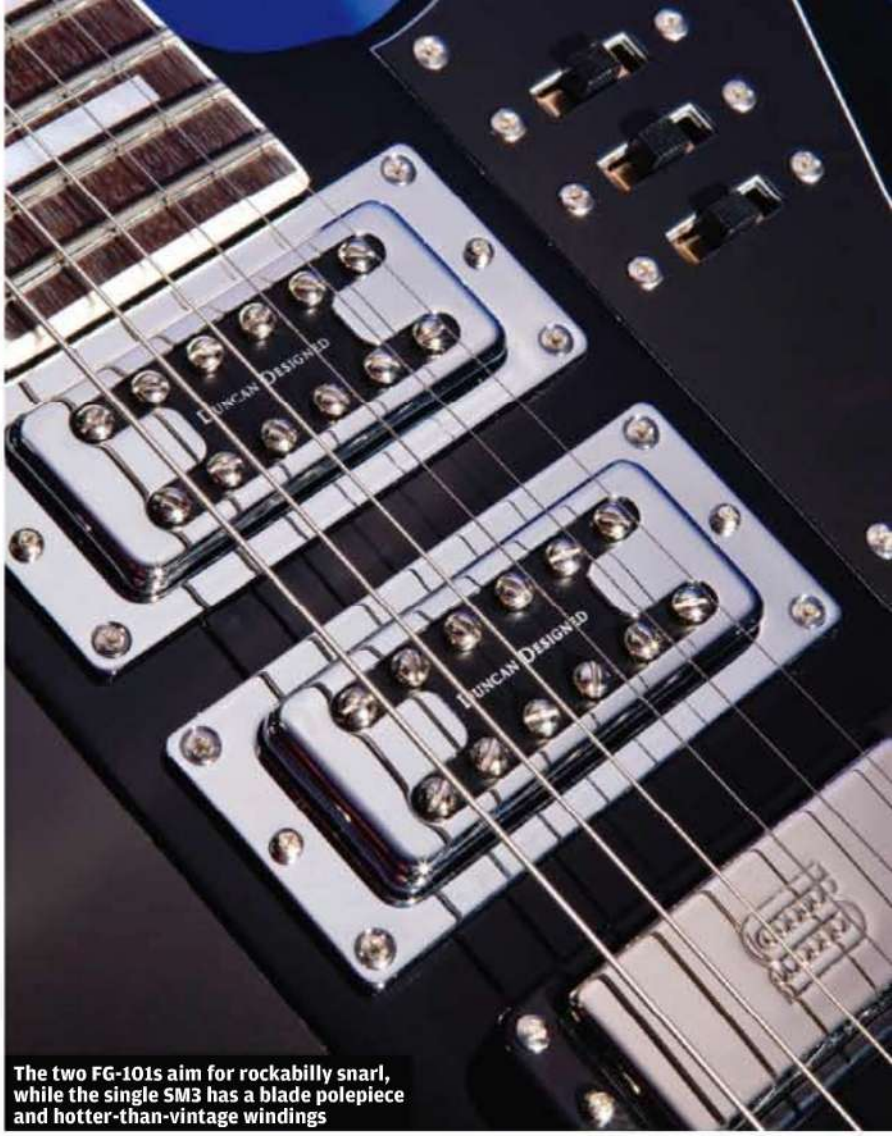
SOUNDS

The acoustic tone is promising. It's big, combining the warmth and sustain of Gibson-style construction with the zing of Fender-style dimensions. As a former Firebird owner I was ready to have the top of my head sliced off by the mini-humbucker into an AC15, but the Duncan SM-3 is well balanced and not too shrill. There's a solidity to the tone that can feel stiffish for clean chord work but even with the coil-tap engaged it's sweet and useable with little harshness.

The other two pickups are Duncan Designed FG-101s, so they're not US-made, and as you might expect from the FilterTron styling they're somewhat cooler in output. There is a little more going on here, but don't hold your breath for a full-on vintage twang assault - we'd need one of these in the bridge position for that. Both retain their character in single-coil mode, the sound simply lightening up as if you'd turned the volume down a few notches. Nothing to make you fall off your chair... until you start playing with those fiddly three-position sliders to create some blended tones. A bit of quacky phase-cancellation is only to be expected from pickups so close together, but with both FG-101s on the Ultra sounds quite Strat-like. Hard to imagine this is quite what Finck was after, but it gets uncannily close to Robert Cray's clean solo sound.

There are no more surprises after that. Coil-tapping one or the other softens things up in a subtle way, but you can't escape that out-of-phase Strat voice. Mixing the SM-3 with one or both of the FG-101s allows a bit of extra tone-shaping, but nothing dramatic. All in all there are (I think) 26 different sound combinations on offer here, but it feels like seven or eight... and they're not all winners. Also, the slightest backing off on the volume brings instant mud, while the tone control does virtually nothing until it's nudging zero, so you'd be best off leaving both alone.

With the gain ramped up it's a similar story. The front two pickups are not at their best, so the mini-humbucker has to take the driving seat. It does so with power and supreme clarity. For the first time in history, Lynyrd Skynyrd fans can now play the *Sweet Home Alabama* intro and the *Free Bird* solo on the same guitar and nail them both! Amp settings may need adjusting to soften the SM-3's eager top end, but not in a radical way. That's just as well, because mixing in one of the other pickups at this point will add an extra element of sweetness and tame the upper mid-range bark but also take away some presence. The range of distorted sounds at the Ultra's disposal is decent but, somehow, as a lead guitar it feels compromised. It may be his signature model, but if Robin Finck had only one six-string to take to his desert island, I'm not convinced it would be this one.



The two FG-101s aim for rockabilly snarl, while the single SM3 has a blade polepiece and hotter-than-vintage windings

The Duncan SM-3 is balanced and not too shrill, and with the gain ramped up it takes the driving seat with power and supreme clarity

Roller bridge saddles help the Bigsby stay in tune

VERDICT

Funnily enough, this is the third GN'R-related signature guitar that's crossed our path in recent months. We liked Slash's Les Paul and Ron Thal's Vigier superstrat, but credit to Finck, and to Schecter, for having the courage to take such a wildly uncharted route. A success? Debatable, but certainly someone out there is going to love this freaky monster.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	17/20
Playability	16/20
Sound	16/20
Value for money	16/20
Vibe	18/20
TOTAL	83%

Good for... looking like Reggie Kray but sounding like Robert Cray

Look elsewhere... for simple pickup switching

www.downmagaz.com

THEY MIGHT HAVE SPLIT UP OR THEY MIGHT HAVE CAPSIZED,

THEY MAY HAVE BROKE DEEP AND TOOK WATER.

AND ALL THAT REMAINS IS THE FACES AND THE NAMES

OF THE WIVES AND THE SONS AND THE DAUGHTERS.

–performed on a D-18 at a memorial for the lives lost on the Great Lakes, 1998

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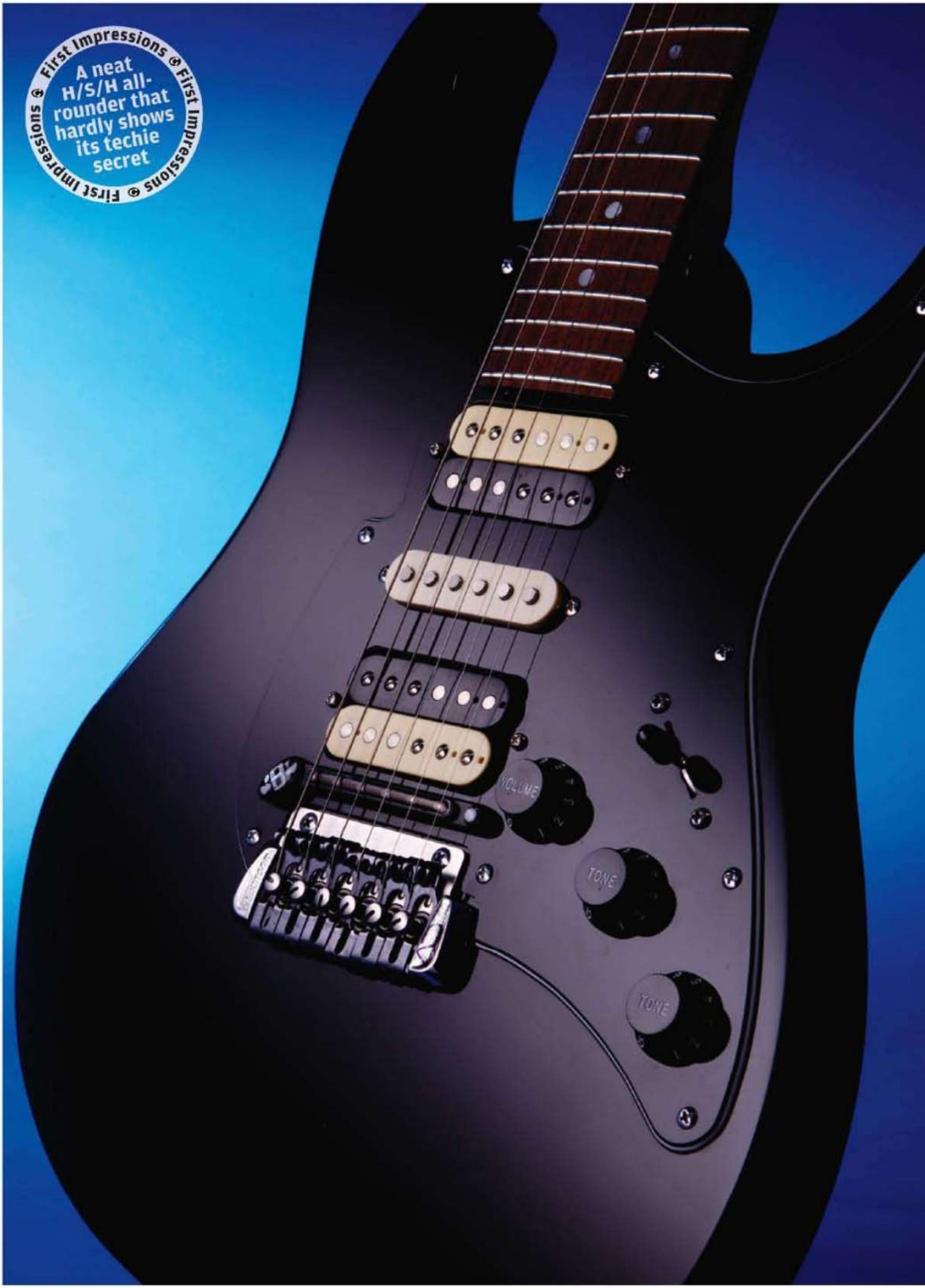


www.downmagaz.com

Price: £1399

An automatic self-tuning guitar from the fertile brain of Trevor Wilkinson, finally here after over a decade of work? Surely that's cause for celebration. Review by Huw Price

Fret-King

Super-Matic Self-Tuning Guitar

The Super-Matic's ATD HT440 self-tuning bridge is the definitive feature of this guitar. Trevor Wilkinson and the team at Auto Tuning Developments developed the system over a period of 14 years. It's described as a 'real time electro-mechanical device utilising ultra hi-tech micro gearboxes, designed to retrofit unobtrusively in to a standard S-type vibrato bridge rout (or similar) with a micro hex pickup'. The ATD bridge also invisibly incorporates all the microprocessor control circuitry.

The HT440 is elegant and unobtrusive. Looking at the bridge, you might not even notice that this guitar has an auto tuning system; the only giveaway is the low profile system pickup, looking like a slimline version of a Roland hex pickup, with a push button at one end and an LCD screen at the other. The screen is low and smooth, so you can rest the palm of your hand on it, and view it from any angle.

Despite the lavish instructions I wound up calling the distributors for advice, and snapping a string didn't help. Once you've grasped the way it operates it's quite easy, but it took me a while to get the hang of it.

The centre segment of the display should light up along with two green arrows. This indicates Autotune mode; as soon as you see this you have to release the button, then press it again to enter the preset section. Once '1' (preset 1) is displayed you can move through the presets by continuing to click that button, but if you pause too long the system switches itself off. This is annoying unless you have memorised which tuning each of the preset numbers represents.

It's been 14 years in development, and the ATD HT440 bridge is a remarkable feat of engineering

Quality maple neck with the familiar Fret-King single-sided headstock and a set of non-locking machineheads

The HT440 unit is elegant and unobtrusive. Looking at the bridge, you might not even notice that this guitar has an auto tuning system

The presets are as follows - 1 Standard, 2 Drop D, 3 Open E, 4 DADGAD, 5 Open A and 6 Open G. As soon as the one you want is on the display, strum the open strings to initiate the auto tuning procedure. If you're not quick enough, the system will shut down again. A low whirring from the capstan motors accompanies the process, and the display shows you each string as it's being tuned.

After one strum, a couple of the strings were usually a bit out; I found it best to strum the strings two or three times to allow the system to nail the pitch. Whatever you do, avoid checking the tuning by playing a chord while the system is operating or things will go pear-shaped. The ATD 440 works independently of the volume, so you can turn down to tune.

FACTFILE

SUPER-MATIC

Description: Solidbody electric guitar. Made in Korea

Price: £1399

Build: Alder body with bolt-on maple neck, 24 fret rosewood fingerboard, diecast tuners

Electrics: Two Wilkinson WHHBZ33 humbuckers and one Wilkinson WHSM single coil pickup, five-way selector switch, master volume and tone controls, humbucker/ single coil fader knob

Left-hander: No

Finish: Black or sunburst

Scale Length: 650mm/25.5"

Neck width:
Nut 42mm
12th fret 52mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 21mm
12th fret 23mm

String spacing:
Nut 35mm
Bridge 53mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 2.5mm
12th fret bass 3.5mm

Weight: 4kg/8.8lbs

Contact: JHS
01132 865381
www.jhs.co.uk

THE COMPETITION

AXCENT
Tuning Systems

This self-tuning system has been around since 1987 and it can be retrofitted to many electric guitar models. Jimmy Page has endorsed it, but the system requires extensive routing – and even after you supply your own host guitar, the cost is pretty daunting

RRP: up to $5000

GIBSON
ROBOT LES PAUL STANDARD 2010

A German company, Tronical, developed the motorised tuners used in Gibson's Robot and Dusk Tiger. Previously available for retrofitting, this system is now exclusive to Gibson and it offers six user-programmable tuning presets

RRP: £2398

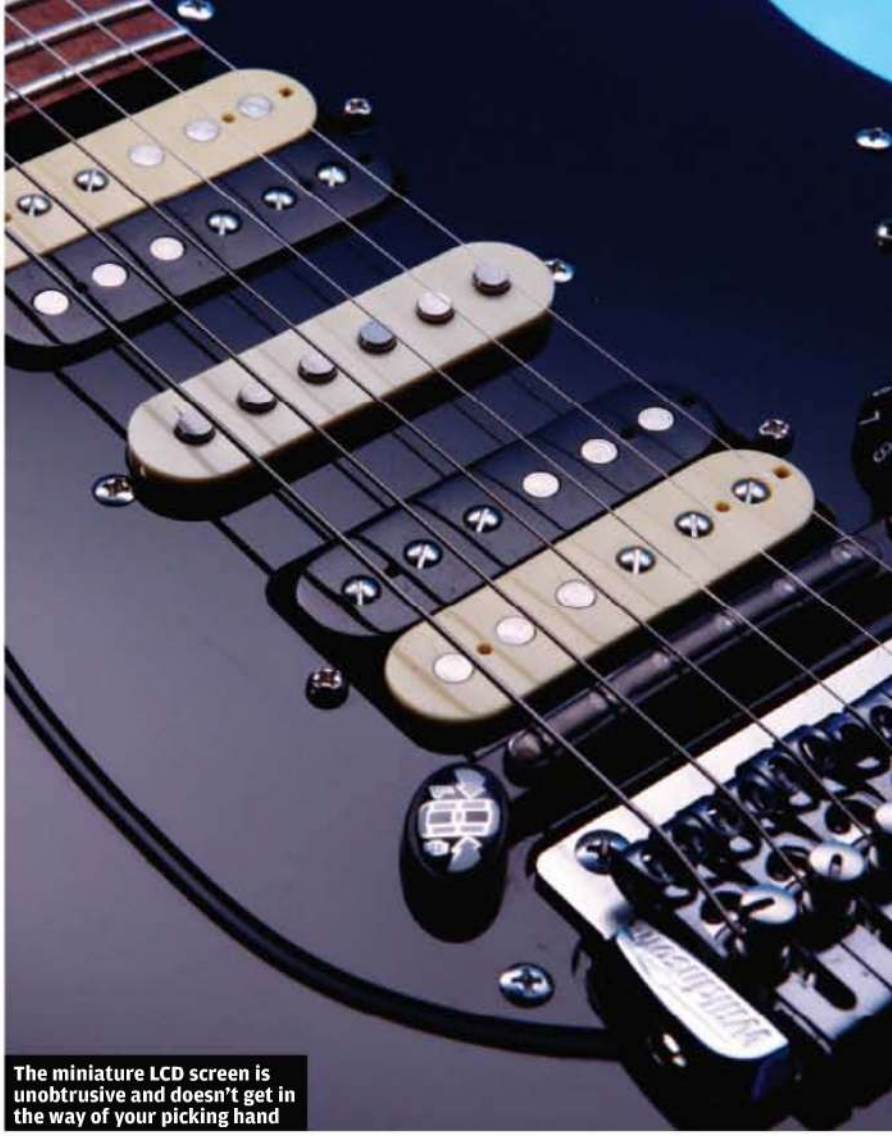
The system works remarkably well once you get used to it, and checking it against an accurate tuner pedal gave impressive results. You can overwrite presets 2-6 with your own tunings, and the system can compensate for any tuning problems should you break a string. Unfortunately the review guitar had been subject to some temperature changes in transit and the intonation might have benefited from adjustment. I found myself tweaking the tuning by ear once I started fretting notes to get the Super-Matic playing sweetly.

The Super-Matic's two-piece body is carved from centre jointed American alder 'using heritage styling cues'- a fabulous way of admitting it's more or less an S-type. The neck profile is described as a shallow C. It feels more medium to me but it's very comfortable and the satin finish enhances the overall feel.

A slab rosewood board carries 24 medium jumbo nickel frets and pearl dot markers, and the Super-Matic features a H/S/H pickup configuration: the bridge and neck zebra humbuckers are Wilkinson WHHBZ33s with offset adjustable polepieces, and a Wilkinson WHSM 'vintage voiced' single coil plays piggy.

SOUNDS

Despite a minor grounding fault that caused the Super-Matic to buzz, the tones were impressive in quality and range. The bridge humbucker has a bright and clear bite with plenty of pick articulation and power. The neck is sweet and smooth with loads of vocal overtones and transparency. With its powerful but bright single coil, the pickup arrangement is a versatile combination, but the second 'tone' control is actually a fader that gradually morphs the humbuckers into single coil mode. Somewhere along the way the coils start phase cancelling, so you can get ultra-Stratty tones even before you add the middle pickup in parallel. So the Super-Matic is an extremely versatile, toneful and easy playing guitar that can cover anything from funk to metal.

The neck is held to the alder body by four recessed screws

The miniature LCD screen is unobtrusive and doesn't get in the way of your picking hand

If you swap tunings for dropped metal, Stonesy riffing or bottleneck, the ATD HT440's speed and accuracy would be useful and very convenient

VERDICT

We need to look at this guitar from two angles. First, there's the Super-Matic itself: though not everybody likes a 'Swiss Army knife' guitar, it covers all bases. Secondly, does the ATD 440 provide sufficient added value to justify the price tag? None of the other guitars in Fret-King's Blue Label range offer this combination of body style and H/S/H pickups, but the current top models peak at around £700, so the ATD 400 system does add a lot to the price (it'll be interesting to see if it ever becomes available separately as a retrofit). You may decide that the ATD HT440 is unnecessary if you play in standard tuning and you have an electronic tuner or a musical ear. However, if you enjoy swapping between tunings for dropped metal, Stonesy riffing or bottleneck excursions, the ATD HT440's speed and accuracy would be very convenient. Trevor Wilkinson and his team have proved that it's possible to make a self-tuning guitar where the technology doesn't dominate or detract from the playing experience. The ATD HT440 is a remarkable feat of engineering, and its success will depend on whether enough guitarists feel that it is something they actually need.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	18/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	17/20
Value for money	14/20
Vibe	15/20
TOTAL	82%

Good for... wide range of tones and tuning up

Look elsewhere... for vintage vibes and any kind of whammy bar action

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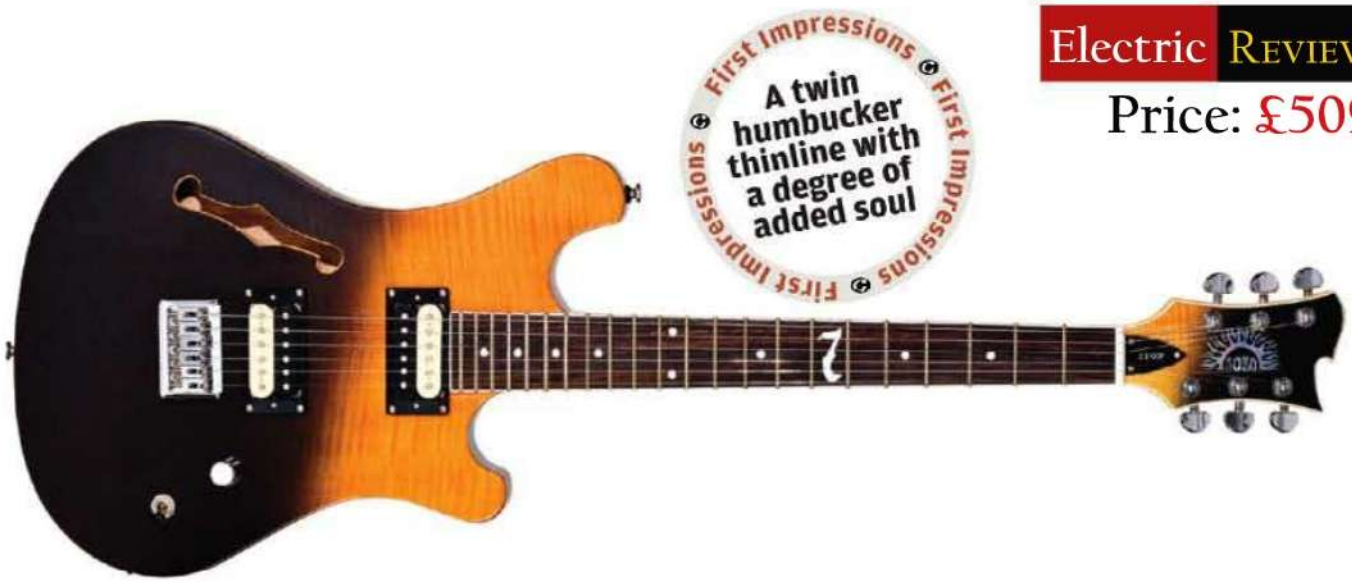
Price: £509



A new brand on our shores, Sozo offers a distinctive sense of style allied to twin humbuckers and a choice of solid or chambered bodies. Review by Martyn Casserley

Sozo

Z2 OGF

Sozo is a relatively new US company with what marketing people slaveringly refer to as 'a unique selling point: in classic Blues Brothers fashion, they are on a mission from God. The company name itself is a translation from the Greek of the New Testament and means 'salvation' or 'born again', a fact that the company's website proudly declares. Now you might think that this would be a bit of a non-starter, what with the music world appearing heavily populated by sweaty heathens, but a quick look at the US market reveals a thriving Christian music scene and a host of potential customers who play in their churches on Sundays. Now the missionaries have arrived on our shores, but will they find the natives sympathetic to their cause?

Z2 OGF

Occupying the mid-range of the Sozo line is the Z2 OGF. The alder body features two slightly square cutaways and a hollowed chamber above the bridge in Fender Thinline style. Astride this a quilted maple top with a single f-hole which bares an unusual black-to-orange livery that we think looks rather spiffing. The chunky maple neck has a worn-in feel and the wide, 22-fret rosewood fingerboard offers plenty of room for chuggy excursions, although this isn't the most comfortable guitar we've ever played in terms of soloing. The action is a bit lofty, but fixable, and the fretwork is fine, but any extended playing time leaves a mild sense of frustration that we had to fight with the guitar a little too much.

The hardware is respectable, with Grover tuners and a simple six-saddle bridge. A solitary volume knob controls two zebra humbuckers, and the pickup selector is placed well for those frantic rhythm to lead switches mid-gig.

The Sozo covers a fair amount of sonic turf and offers something a little more original than a straight knockoff

SOUNDS

On a clean setting the Z2 offers a nice chimey warmth on the neck pickup. Little jazzy runs sound good... not quite as complex as a 335, but still employable at a push. Old-style blues tones make use of the Z2's punchy voice, and crunchy-toned Queen riffs work well. The absence of a tone control doesn't feel too much of a bind, and both pickups offer a decent variation of sounds that never feel too muddy or shrill.

Stepping up the gain into harder rock territory allows the clarity of the pickups to shine. Definition is good, useful for crunchy arpeggiated riffs, and the sustain is also respectable, with controlled feedback offering even more options to the adventurous player.

VERDICT

In many areas the unusual-looking Sozo Z2 delivers what you would want from a guitar in this price range. It looks good, can cover a fair amount of sonic turf, and offers something a little more original than a straight Les Paul/Strat knockoff. The only real issue we have is that it just doesn't feel that brilliant to play. When compared to the likes of Vintage, Epiphone and the very impressive Sterling ranges, it becomes difficult to recommend the Z2 with any real conviction. It's not a bad guitar, but it's not a great one, and these days that's not really enough. When you consider the carpenter that inspired the company, perhaps he deserves something a bit better.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	15/20
Playability	13/20
Sound	16/20
Value for money	13/20
Vibe	13/20
TOTAL	70%

Good for... something a little different

Look elsewhere... for regular looks and a more comfortable playing experience

FACTFILE

Z2 OGF

Description: Semi-hollow electric guitar. Made in Korea

Price: £509

Build: Alder body with hollow chamber, flamed maple top, maple neck with rosewood fretboard and 22 medium frets, six-saddle bridge, Grover tuners

Electrics: Two zebra humbuckers, volume control, pickup selector

Left-Handers: No

Finish: Orange-fade (as reviewed), fire-fade.

Scale length: 648mm/25.5"

Neck width:
Nut 44mm
12th fret 54mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 24mm
12th fret 25mm

String spacing:
Nut 36mm
Bridge 52mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 3mm
12th fret bass 4mm

Weight: 3.18kg/7lbs

Contact:
Rock Tone Distribution
01730 300752
www.sozoguitars.com

THE COMPETITION

EPIPHONE
Les Paul Std 1959
When only a Paul will do, this classy twin humbuckered beauty has plenty of grunt
RRP: £649

VINTAGE
AV2
An affordable chambered-body single/humbucking T-type from the ever-reliable Vintage brand.
RRP: £439

MUSIC MAN
Sterling AX40
A fantastic mid-range rocker with twin 'buckers, quilted maple top and glorious tones
RRP: £579

With the innards from several Boss distortions, a Power Squeezer feature, two channels and 15W of power, the new Cube-15XL aims to impress. Review by Sam Kuttner

FACTFILE

CUBE 15XL

Description: 15W two-channel solid state amp, switchable to 2W. 1x8" speaker. Made in China

Controls: Input jack, Clean channel volume, Lead channel volume, Gain and Mode selector. Treble, Mid, Bass controls. Aux input, phones/ recording output, Power Squeezer switch, channel selector, power switch

RRP: £85

Dimensions: 335mm wide, 240mm deep, 335mm high

Weight: 7.1kg/15.6lbs

Contact: Roland
01792 702701
www.roland.co.uk

Roland

Cube-15XL

The battlefield for practice amp dominance is fought tooth and nail by some of the biggest companies in the game. No longer will you find glorified car stereo speakers that produce tones akin to electric eels copulating in the shallows while men cook bacon in frying pans nearby; nowadays it's all very different. We have digital trickery that can turn little bedroom boom-boxs into molten towers of rock without waking the kids, and even valve amps have been tamed to produce those lusted after sagging tones at volumes that won't cause your neighbours to end up on *Crimewatch*.

Into this unforgiving and vicious arena strides Roland's new Cube amp, the 15XL. Its lineage is one that demands respect, but no quarter will be given for reputation: this little brute will need to fight his own battles if it is to survive. Let the swords of tone be drawn and the war cries of a hundred classic riffs fill the air...

With one twiddle of a knob the 15XL provides four different flavours of dirt

www.downmagaz.com

Price: £85

CUBE 15XL

The 15XL joins the respected Cube family that has sold, crikey, over a million units to date. Electric six-stringers currently have a choice of 13, from the Micro Cube through to two battery models, the Mobile Cube and Cube Street; then comes a series featuring increased power and features, from lowly 15-watters up through 20, 30, 40 and finally 80W models.

The 15XL is all about going back to basics, save for the addition of four filth presets. As with all the Cubes it's adorned with tough-looking corner protectors and a silver-coloured metal grill. This instantly gives the impression of a unit that is built to last. The squat shape and size also allude to a no-nonsense practicality that is a reassuring break from the sometimes overwhelming flashing lights and displays of other amps in this class (in fact there are only two lights on the whole thing and they're never on at the same time, as they indicate which of the two channels is selected).

The controls are equally pragmatic. There's a three-band equaliser, a Clean channel volume, plus Gain and Volume controls for the Lead channel, which also features four modes (Overdrive, Distortion, Metal Zone and Extreme) accessed by a dedicated rotary knob. There's the statutory Aux input (for CD players, iPods etc) and a headphone/direct recording output, plus a kind of attenuator button called a Power Squeezer that drops the output from 15W to 2W – and that's it. No alternative amp models, no time-based effects, not even a built-in tuner. This amp is simply meant to be played. So it would seem rude not to.

SOUNDS

With the EQ dials all set to 12 o'clock the Cube puts out a warm and confident clean tone that would cut the mustard in most home practice circumstances. In fact mucking about with the EQ shows that it's quite a versatile little amp. Boosting the bass and dialling back the treble results in deeper and quite convincing jazzy tones, while maxing out the treble and getting rid of everything else releases a stinging country sound that's great fun.

Engaging the Lead channel and setting the mode to Overdrive is a pleasant surprise, as the eight-inch speaker combined with the circuit voicing issues forth a cool, boxy midrange tone that instantly sounds like the '70s. Chords growl in a satisfying way and as the gain increases there's a good amount of separation but also plenty of bite. It's quite easy to get from dirty blues to Guns N'Roses territory before you've even moved off the first mode. Lower volumes can get slightly cloudy but the EQ is responsive and can deal with this, as can selecting the Power Squeeze and turning up the volume. It's actually a loud amp in either mode and would probably make a brave fist of small rehearsals if you don't have a mental drummer (good luck on that one) but it definitely sounds more open with the Power Squeeze off. Moving through the other modes replicates the what-it-says-on-the-tin nature of the Cube. Everything works well and does the job it was designed for, leaving you to get on with the business of playing, just like a proper amp should do.

There are a few things that would make the experience more complete. The addition of reverb would fill out the clean channel more (although it sounds deep without it) and a dedicated volume for the Aux Input would be cool, but at this price it seems a bit churlish to want more.

With no sub-menus, no editing and nary a USB port, the Cube-15XL is an old-school amp with plenty of chug and grunt

VERDICT

There are many reasons why the Cube 15XL should feature prominently on your practice amp shopping list. The size means it will fit neatly into even the most shoeboxy of rooms, and tonally it's an impressive little item with plenty of grunt and chug allied to a pleasing clean channel. There are no sub-menus to navigate, no patch editing, and nary a USB port in sight. One might even venture to call it old-school. Now of course you might want all those things, and there's no shame in that, and in that case you will find plenty of options to suit your needs. But if you just want something simple that sounds good and makes you louder, then the Cube would be an excellent choice.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	17/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	17/20
Value for money	18/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	87%

Good for... practice and fairly low-volume, small-room rehearsals, without any fuss

Look elsewhere... if you like bells and whistles

THE COMPETITION

MARSHALL
MG15

Another twin channel 15W amp with an 8" speaker and three-band EQ from the legends of British rock

RRP: £84.99

FENDER
FRONTMAN 15R

A Blackface-style twin channel Fender with CD input, headphone output, and – as the 'R' suffix suggests – reverb

RRP: £97.53

VOX
DA5

This little 5W Vox contains 11 different amp models and a look that is undeniably cool

RRP: £93

FACTFILE

POD HD500

Specs: 16 amp models (two at once), over 100 effect pedals (eight usable at once), 48-second looper, tuner, tap tempo, assignable MIDI footswitch controls, USB 2.0 port for connecting the unit to a PC/Mac for editing with free Line 6 software.

Controls: 12 footswitches, expression pedal; Drive, Bass, Mid, Treble, Presence, Volume, Master, four parameter dials; View and Save dial; Move (a four-way d-pad control)

Connections: 1/4" input jack, 1/4" aux input, XLR input & microphone preamp, Variax digital input, MP3/CD input, unbalanced 1/4" outputs, balanced XLR outputs, 1/4" stereo headphone output, S/PDIF output, 1/4" stereo FX send/return, five-pin MIDI input & output/thru, aux expression pedal input, L6 Link for Line 6 DT50 amp

Range Options: HD300 (£259), HD400 (£339)

RRP: £409

Dimensions: 546mm wide, 74mm high, 270mm deep

Weight: 4.5kg/10lbs

Contact: Line 6
01327 302700
http://uk.line6.com

Hang on: aren't Pods small and red and cuddly? Not this one: it's very large and very black and sets out to be your do-absolutely-anything stage favourite. Review by Martyn Casserly

Line 6

Pod HD500

In 1996 a small California-based company began its assault on the music world with a guitar amplifier that claimed to digitally emulate other models. The AxSys, as it was called, caused some mild interest among the more adventurous members of the guitar fraternity, but it didn't exactly set the world on fire. The company, itself bearing the rather odd name of Line 6, then released a kidney bean-shaped device called the Pod - and they pretty much changed the world as we know it. Some 15 years later that quirky little machine can be found in many of the top recording studios around the world, has featured on more albums than you probably realise, and has propelled modelling specialist Line 6 into the very big leagues.

The edit screen lies at the heart of the Pod HD500

www.downmagaz.com

Price: £409

Not ones to sit on their laurels, the technicians have refined and improved the modelling tones and moved the technology into a range of pedalboards so that players can use them on stage. The Pod HD500 is the latest current flagship model of the Line 6 fleet. All aboard!

POD HD500

If you're the kind of person who only ever uses one guitar sound, maybe with a boost pedal for solos, then you're probably best skipping this review. Also, if you think an iPad is some kind of new-fangled sanitary device, then this isn't for you either. If on the other hand you're not intimidated by menus, multiple function controls and the odd bit of parameter tweaking then the HD500 might just be an answer to your prayers.

When the box first arrived we wondered whether Line 6 had expanded their range to include flat-packed furniture, such was the size. Unpacked it looks a bit more manageable, and the clean layout seems to have a lot of space for our clumsy size nines to clump about on. Two lines of six silver footswitches dominate the board, with an expression pedal beside them.

The four middle switches on the bottom row are used to select which preset you want active, and the banks can be selected using the far left switches (top and bottom). The top row is used for switching the various effect units you can have in a patch on and off, just like a physical pedalboard, with the final two controls used for a tuner/tap tempo and to activate the built-in looper. When in looper mode - fantastic for working out solos by recording the rhythm chords and then playing over them - the footswitches act as controls for the various functions such as recording, undoing, half time, and even reverse. Lots of fun.

Above these are a row of EQ knobs and volumes, but the main area of interest is the large, bright screen where all of the editing takes place. Here, aided by a few handy dials and buttons, you can adjust pretty much anything you want: organising your pedal chain, editing your amp parameters, grouping presets together into set-lists, even adjusting the virtual mics.

In classic Line 6 style the controls make a lot of sense at first glance, but reading the well-written manual will give you the most control over this powerful interface. A quick glance at the back reveals more exotic connections than a corrupt FIFA official. There's in and outs for MIDI, balanced/unbalanced output ports for amps and PAs, a CD/MP3 input, connections for Mics, headphones, USB, S/PDIF, Variax, and even an FX loop. Phew!

Analogue-style tweakers will find refuge in the row of traditional EQ and Drive knobs

SOUNDS

Line 6 has made a big deal of their new HD modelling. The difference to previous incarnations is, they claim, the addition of a more natural feel. Whatever the trickery involved it's certainly apparent that the HD500 sounds great and does indeed feel very good to play. Clean tones sparkle, overdrives are meaty, and high gains are downtuningly bombastic. With 16 different amps to choose from and over 100 pedals the wealth of sounds available is incredible. The presets will keep you fiddling for hours as you move from U2 to Van Halen to Muse, all with an instant recognisability that players from cover bands will find very useful. The real strength of this unit, though, is when you get your hands virtually dirty and build your own tones, tweaking every last thing until you find the sound you've always wanted. A sonic treasure trove, if ever there was one.

With 16 different amps and over 100 pedals available the wealth of sounds is incredible

VERDICT

As we said at the onset, this latest Line 6 unit is not for everyone. For many players, the level of customisation available and sheer breadth of the options will be far too much for their everyday needs. Line 6 themselves know this, so they've wisely chosen to release the much simpler HD300 and HD400 versions.

On the other hand, if you're looking for a one-stop sound-shop that will let you control virtually every aspect of your sound and enable you to experiment and design your own tones, all in a package that can connect to pretty much anything you can think of and is also rugged enough to lug halfway around the world without fearing for its safety, then the HD500 is probably the best thing that we've got available at this time. You just wonder what's to come in the next 15 years...

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	19/20
Usability	16/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	18/20
Vibe	19/20
TOTAL	90%

Good for... having total control over your sound

Look elsewhere... If you just want a nice simple overdrive pedal

THE COMPETITION

BOSS
GT10
Probably the main contender for the crown. Tons of effects, options, knobs, flashing lights, and pro-level sounds
RRP: £445

ZOOM
G9.2tt
Two expression pedals, up to 10 effects at once, plenty of amp models, and free Cubase LE software for direct USB recording
RRP: £333

DIGITECH
RP1000
The new top of the line model from Digitech. All the features you'd expect from the RP range and quality to match
RRP: £552.25

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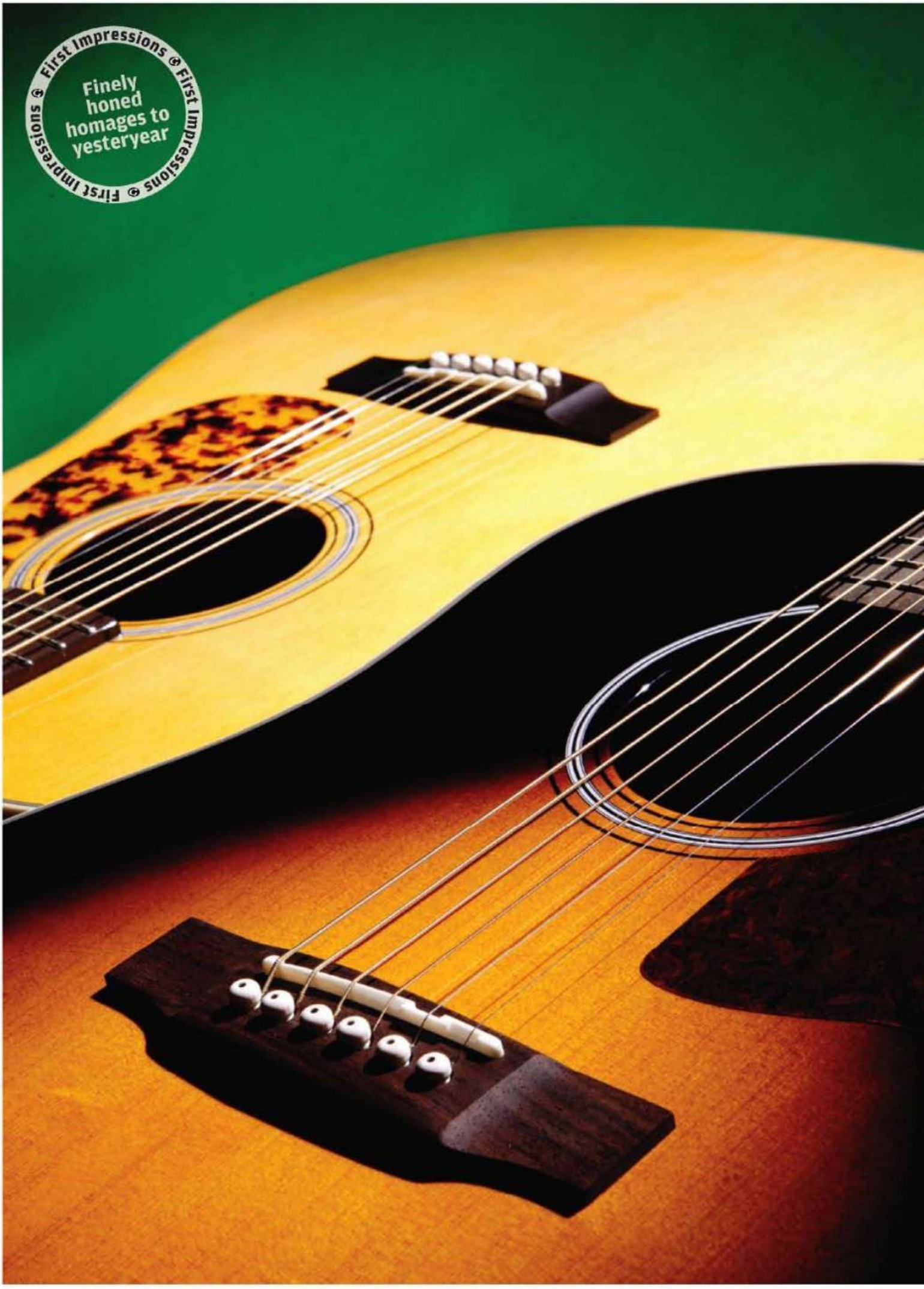


www.downmagaz.com

Price: £469

Big necks are going to be all the rage in 2011, and Tanglewood is getting in on the act with some generously chunky-feeling Historic guitars. Review by Jerry Uwins

Tanglewood

TW40D-AN & TW40SD-VS Historic

Tanglewood already offers an extensive catalogue of budget and mid-price acoustics, and the choice has just become even wider with the recent addition of a concise line-up of Historic models. Presently linked to the Sundance Series, though possibly soon to become a series in their own right, the Historics comprise three body styles: a Martin-style dreadnought and a J-style slope-shoulder dread both under review here, plus a 000. All three are optionally available as Fishman-powered electros. The Historic moniker relates to more than the guitars' cosmetic approach - they've also got all-new neck profiles.

A cool dalmatian pickguard adds a pleasing 1930s atmosphere to the TW40D-AN dreadnought

The top is solid, but the back and sides are laminated. A strap button in the heel is a thoughtful touch

TW40D-AN

Since the style of neck is a key element of the Historics, it's good place to start on this full-scale, square-shouldered big box. We're in airy picking territory for one thing, with a semi-wide nut span of 44.5mm and a generous string spacing at the bridge of nearly 57mm. The other attribute is a pretty full grip, the soft-V'd profile kicking off at 22.5mm in front of the peghead's diamond volute, deepening to over 25mm before the heel turn. Add all this to a span that broadens a fair amount towards the octave, and you have a pretty uncompromising configuration. Having said that, it's a fine player once you've adjusted to it, and it's entirely in keeping with the instrument's 'historic' remit. The body-matching gloss lacquer provides a slick touch, and it's worth noting that aside from a separate heel portion, the neck's mahogany is a one-piece affair. The heel carries a second strap button - not an historic requirement but a very useful hardware inclusion that also applies to our slope-shoulder model.

The TW40D is a willing performer with plenty of punch and projection, and it feels comfortably at home whether strumming or picking

The T40D's trim is simple yet elegant. The cream-bound solid spruce/laminated mahogany body - finished in antique natural, hence the 'AN' suffix - carries an amber ageing toner on the top, the

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	19/20
Playability	16/20
Sound	17/20
Value for money	17/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	**86%**

Good for... authentic retro handful, cosmetic taste, pleasing sound

Look elsewhere... for a slimmer, shallower neck

FACTFILE

TW40D-AN

Description: Dreadnought acoustic. Made in China

Price: £469

Build: Solid spruce top and laminated mahogany back/sides. Mahogany neck, 20-fret rosewood fingerboard. Rosewood bridge, bone nut and saddle, open-back tuners, two strap buttons

Options: TW40D-ANE electro with Fishman Sonitone (£549)

Left-handers: No

Finish: Gloss antique natural

Scale length: 650mm/25.6"

Neck width:
Nut 44.5mm
12th fret 56

Depth of neck:
First fret 22.5mm
9th fret 25mm

String spacing:
Nut 37.5mm
Bridge 56.5mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 2.4mm
12th fret bass 2.6mm

Max rim depth: 121mm

Max body width: 397mm

Fingerboard radius: 16"

Weight: 1.93kg/4.25lb

THE COMPETITION

BLUERIDGE
BR140 HISTORIC

Amber-tint top, dalmatian-tortie pickguard, open tuners and ornate headstock inlaywork

RRP: £469

RECORDING KING
RD26

One-piece V-profile neck with diamond volute, open-geared tuners and snowflake markers

RRP: £369

CRAFTER
DV200/N

45mm fingerstyle neck with herringbone soundhole rosette and amber-buttoned tuners

RRP: £479

Note: All the above are all-solid spruce/mahogany

Price: £469

FACTFILE

TW40SD-VS

Description: Slope-shoulder dreadnought acoustic. Made in China

Price: £469

Build: Solid spruce top, laminated mahogany back and sides. Mahogany neck with 20-fret unbound rosewood fingerboard. Rosewood bridge, bone nut and saddle, open-back nickel tuners, two strap buttons

Options: TW40SD-VSE electro with Fishman Sonitone system (£549). Other Historic debuts are two solid spruce/mahogany OOOs – TW400-AN (£469) and electro TW400-ANE (£549)

Left-handers: No

Finish: Gloss vintage sunburst

Scale length: 650mm/25.6"

Neck width:
Nut 44.5mm
12th fret 56mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 23mm
9th fret 25mm

String spacing:
Nut 37.5mm
Bridge 57mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 2.3mm
12th fret bass 2.5mm

Max rim depth: 122mm

Max body width: 403mm

Fingerboard radius: 16"

Weight: 1.98kg/4.35lb

Contact: EMC
01959 571600
www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk

THE COMPETITION

MARINER
JX-6SB

All-solid-wood build with vintage sunburst top. Comes with maple body and neck bindings and open-back tuners

RRP: £485

BLUERIDGE
BG-40

In tobacco sunburst with laminated back/sides. Includes diamond/snowflake neck markers and vintage tuners

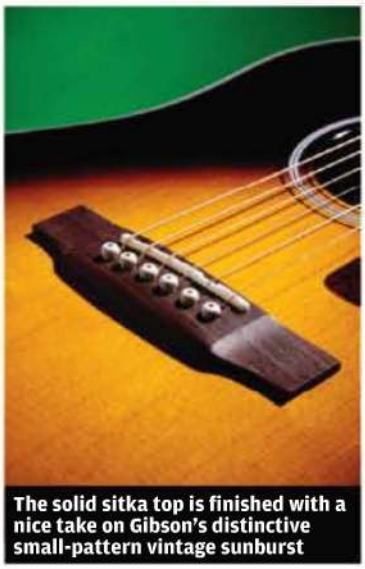
RRP: £449

OZARK
3392

Budget choice in dark honey sunburst, again with laminated back and sidesand tulip-buttoned machineheads

RRP: £280

Note: All the above are spruce/mahogany



The solid sitka top is finished with a nice take on Gibson's distinctive small-pattern vintage sunburst

A straight-topped headstock is an oddity on a slope dread but the open-geared machineheads look the part

The TW40SD is maybe a little softer-edged in the attack, but the chances are that in a blindfold test you couldn't tell them apart

pickguard is see-through tortie-plastic redolent of the 'dalmatian' type used on Blueridges, and the rosewood-faced spade headstock – with vintage, squared-off top corners rather than the softer profile of other Tanglewoods' – totes a period-appropriate set of unbranded, Waverly-style open-geared tuners.

Position markers on the unbound rosewood fingerboard are tasteful pearloid micro-dots. Save for fret ends that could do with a touch more rounding off, the presentation and standard of finishing are very smart indeed.

SOUNDS

The guitar is a willing performer. It has the requisite dread punch and projection, the dynamics are supple despite the taut string tension, and there's a pleasing fluidity of warmth in the lows and a nice singing quality to the sustainful, bright yet well balanced highs. It's an instrument that feels and sounds as comfortably at home whether strumming or picking.

TW40SD-VS

From Martin-like territory we move to the slope-shoulder fella, with a body profile inspired by the elegant Gibson J-45, as often referred to as an Advanced Jumbo as it is a dreadnought. Aside from its rounded shouldering and broader, subtler waisting, the TW40SD measures, at just under 16", a quarter-inch or so wider across the lower bouts than the TW40D. Build again comprises a solid spruce top and laminated mahogany back and sides, the top this time treated to a handsome dark vintage sunburst, and the back and sides stained to a dark red-brown. Buffing of the all-gloss finish is excellent. The soundhole rosette is similar to the other guitar's, but the black/cream purfling around the top adds an extra ply to give a slightly wider-bound look. The pointy-ended scratchplate is an opaque red-brown tortie plastic; the traditional belly bridge with its ivory-colour pins is a component shared by both instruments, as are their bone nuts and saddles.

Save for a black peghead cap and a darker stain under the gloss lacquer, the neck is a dead ringer of the TW40D's, though with a shade more depth under the first position. The result, then, is once more a trad, fingerstyle-friendly feel. The higher-position depth might initially feel a touch daunting but it soon proves to be an obliging player of its type.

SOUNDS

This guitar's sound is closely comparable with its stablemate's. It's maybe a little softer-edged in the attack, and the low end perhaps isn't quite as warmly forthcoming, but the overall timbre is broadly similar and equally likeable, and chances are that in a blindfold test you mightn't tell the two instruments apart.

VERDICT

A dread, a slope and a 000 are three very well-chosen models for Tanglewood to use for their initial Historic series. In theory both our review guitars lose out against some similar-priced and cheaper all-solid-wood rivals, but in light of their accomplished performance, high-quality build and handsome old-fashioned appeal, the laminated back and sides don't deserve to be a deal-breaker. Neither do their necks, because they're central to the whole Historic exercise: getting a vintage grip on things. In that context, these guitars work admirably.

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	19/20
Playability	16/20
Sound	16/20
Value for money	17/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	**85%**

Good for... as TW40D-AN, and slope-shoulder styling is always a favourite

Look elsewhere... as TW40D-AN

www.downmagaz.com

Inspiration to Perfection

Earl Slick

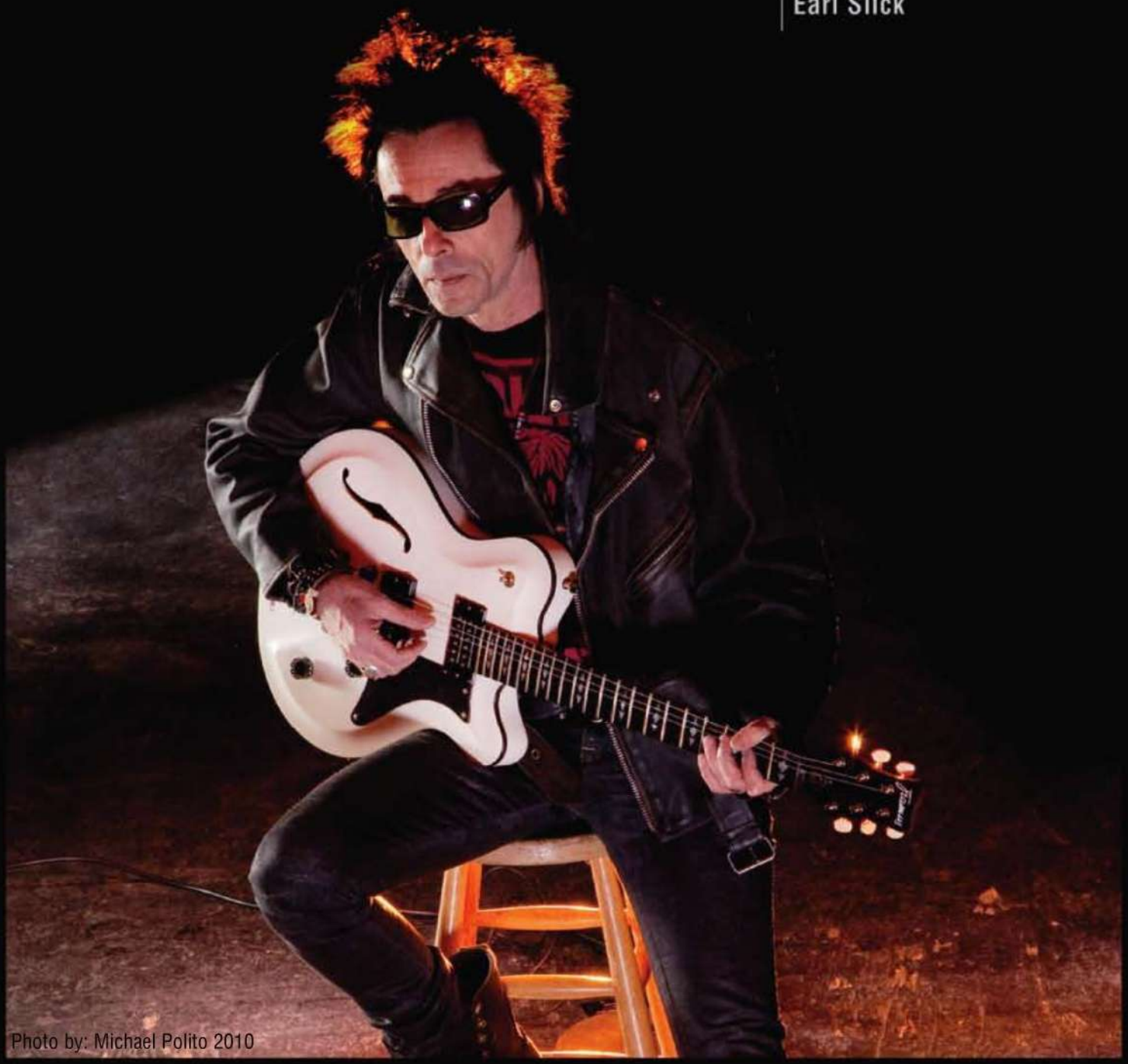


Photo by: Michael Polito 2010

Earl and the Thin White Duke made history from “Station to Station” to “Reality”. Now Slick is backing another Rock ‘n’ Roll legend: Framus.

Earl Slick (David Bowie, John Lennon a.o.)

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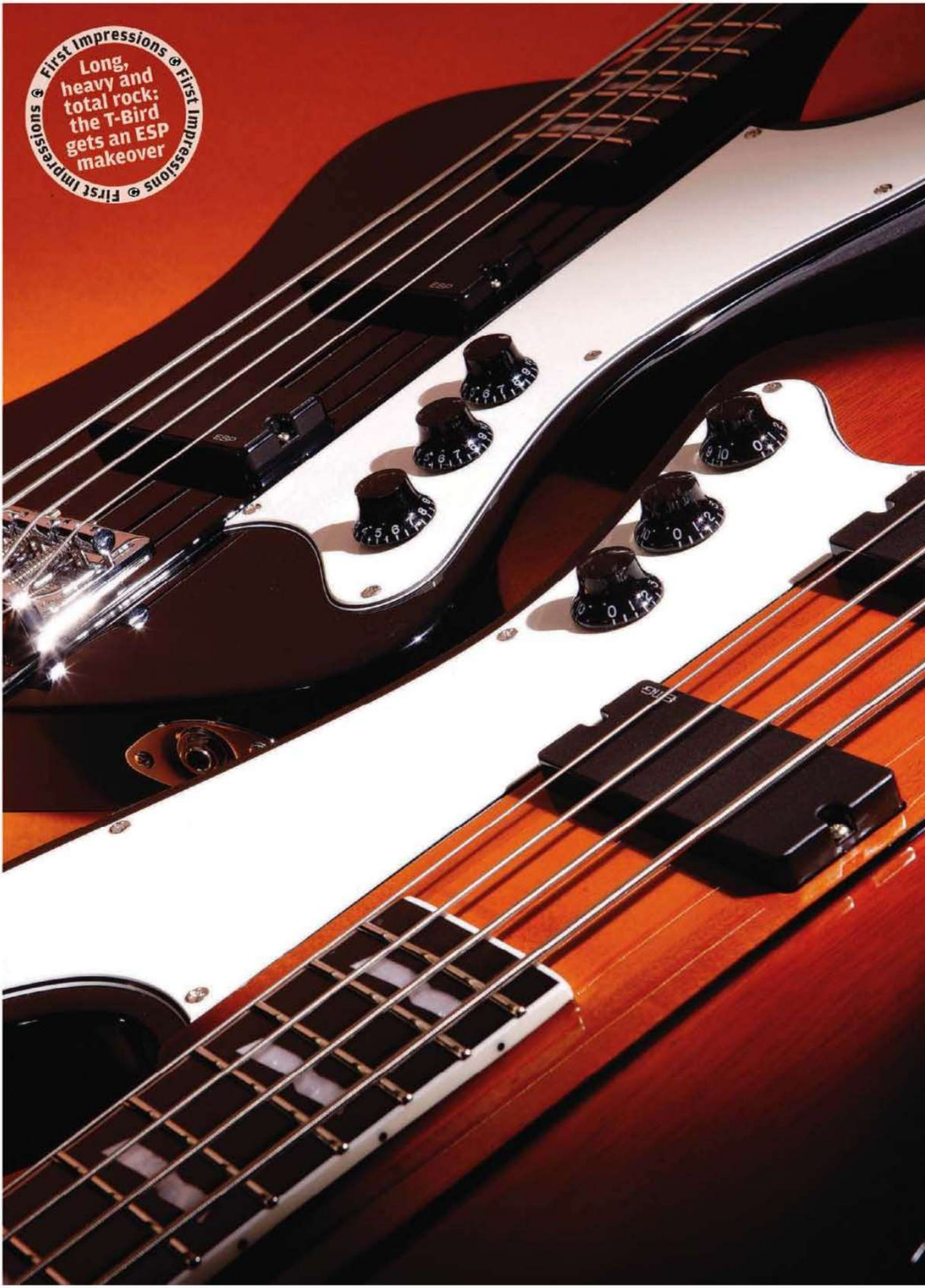

www.downmagaz.com

Price: £499

Never did a bass look meaner than a low-slung Thunderbird, and now ESP is getting in on the act with a pair of tributes in their import LTD lines. Review by Gareth Morgan

ESP LTD

Phoenix-204 & Phoenix-1004 Basses

We here at *G&B* have always had a soft spot for ESP basses. The J-1004 'super Jazz' (Aug 2003, Vol 14/4) and the active D-4 (Nov 2007, Vol 18/10) both won Gear Of The Year awards. We also have an illogical affection for the Gibson Thunderbird bass, even though it's too heavy and poorly balanced - so what we have this month for review has got us slathering like a pack of rabid dogs.

PHOENIX-204

As the Gibson Thunderbird, introduced in '63, was the bass version of Gibson's Firebird, you can see where ESP's Phoenix name came from. Made in China, the Phoenix-204 resides in the lowest pricing group of ESP's affordable LTD series. The basswood body is coated in glossy black and has a radical offset design that apes Gibson's original, complete with a white scratchplate that's been extended to encapsulate the controls at one end and to take account of the more exaggerated lower horn at the other. These details are the most noticeable design tweaks, and the Phoenix is none the worse for it.

The set neck is maple, and its slim 'U' contour makes for comfort and speed in the playing department. The headstock is a reverse arrowhead with chrome Gotoh tuners lining up along the bottom edge; it takes a couple of tune-ups to get used to it. The rosewood fingerboard carries 21 jumbo nickel frets and is inlaid with 'billowing flag' position markers plus ESP's trademark model name inlay at the 12th fret. The bridge is ESP's own-brand DB-4, and it sits on a raised central section - a three-dimensional detail borrowed from the Gibson original.

Although you could say the 204 is active, the truth is slightly more complicated. ESP's SB-4 pickups are passive, but the output system is given a leg-up by their ATB-1 active tonal boost circuit. Controls are straightforward: two pickup volumes and one master tone.

Instead of a swept-wing guard, ESP's T-Birdalike has a larger scratchplate that surrounds the two vols and tone

This most affordable Phoenix comes with ESP's own-brand bridge and a pair of passive humbuckers

The Phoenix-204 has growling lows with plenty of body on the higher strings plus a high-mid clarity that cuts through. It's very rock'n'roll

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	18/20
Playability	15/20
Sound	15/20
Value for money	16/20
Vibe	16/20
TOTAL	**80%**

Good for... Rocking out in the Thunderbird style on a budget

Look elsewhere... For more tonal variation or a lighter or more evenly balanced bass

FACTFILE

204

Description: Solidbody bass. Made in China

Price: £499

Build: Basswood body, maple set neck with 21 jumbo nickel frets, rosewood fingerboard with pearloid flag inlays. ESP DB-4 bridge and ESP open-gear tuners. Chrome hardware

Electrics: Active with two ESP SB-4 pickups with ESP ATB-1 active tone boost. Two volumes and one tone control

Left hander: No

Finishes: Black, white and three tone sunburst (white and s/b are UK market only)

Range Options: None

Scale length: 864mm/34"

Width of neck:
Nut 40mm
12th fret 56mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 20mm
12th fret 22mm

String spacing:
Nut 11mm
Bridge 19mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 2.5mm
12th fret bass 3.0mm

Weight: 4.5kg/9.9lbs

Contact: Selectron
01795 419460
www.espguitars.co.uk

Price: £1049

FACTFILE

1004

Description: Solidbody bass. Made in Korea

Price: £1049

Build: Mahogany body wings, maple through neck/body core, 21 jumbo nickel frets on an ebony fingerboard with pearloid flag inlays. Gotoh bridge and tuners. Chrome hardware

Electrics: Active with two EMG 35DC pickups. Two volumes and one tone control

Left hander: No

Finishes: Three tone sunburst and black

Range Options: None

Scale length: 864mm/34"

Width of neck:
Nut 40mm
12th fret 56mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 20mm
12th fret 24mm

String spacing:
Nut 11mm
Bridge 19mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 2.5mm
12th fret bass 3mm

Weight: 4.7kg/10.34lbs

Contact: Selectron
01795 419460
www.espguitars.co.uk

EMG 35DC pickups add extended range to the thumpiness always associated with this style of bass

A lot of the extra money goes into the 1104's proper maple/mahogany through-neck construction

At £550 more the Korean-built 1004 has through-neck construction, an ebony board, Gotoh tuners and bridge, and active EMGs

SOUNDS

T-Bird fans amongst you wondering whether ESP have solved the seated balance issues inherent in the design should have no fear... they haven't. Everything's cool on a strap, however, provided you don't wear it too high - which, given the Phoenix's rocky leanings, is unlikely. Roll the tone pot to full and the 204 has growling lows with plenty of body on the higher strings plus a high-mid clarity that enables it to cut through nicely. It's very rock'n'roll. Soloing the neck pickup gives a rubbery thud with dark, raspy low mids, and playing up the neck uncovers a fat, responsive tone that cries out for melody: it's a great pickup for trad rock or blues. The bridge pickup isn't bad, either, with barking tone that'll suit gritty, more modern scenarios.

PHOENIX-1004

Though we've been referencing the Gibson Thunderbird, the important question is how the Phoenix-1004 shapes up to its sister. Costing an extra £550, the 1004 is part of the Deluxe range and is made in Korea instead of China. There's no difference in body shape, but underneath the three-tone sunburst poly finish are mahogany wings glued to a five-piece maple core/through-neck section. This should offer more resonance and sustain, but the construction makes the 1004 a bit heavier than the 204.

Flag inlays and 12th fret model name inlay remain the same, but this time the fingerboard is hard-wearing ebony. The headstock is the same, but the tuners are posher Gotohs, as is the bridge. The pickups are a pair of active EMG 35DCs which 'incorporate an ultra-low-noise low-impedance internal preamp paired with ceramic-loaded dual parallel coils' designed to pump out plenty of juice across the whole spectrum. The controls are still two volumes and a master tone.

SOUNDS

The physical balance issues are exactly the same, but the sound is not. The 1004 gives you more actual output level, a sensation of more power, and a juicier sound. Though the basic character is the same as the 204, dialling the tone pot to full is like engaging the afterburners. It's a lot nastier, especially at the bottom end, where there's a weightier thud and a throaty snarl. This really makes it more enjoyable to play; if you're going choose a more out-there design, you want to be able to get a tone that at least heads in that direction, right?

The EMGs do a great job. They have an even response, with enough higher midrange for clarity without bias or brittleness, and this all comes in a more lively overall package. The earthy feel is enhanced by the neck pickup, morphing the raspy edge into a snarl. There's more solidity to the centre of the note, and the thinner strings and higher registers are equipped with extra cut and bite that makes you really want to play up there. The bridge EMG has a snappier gurgle that even encourages forays into finger-funk. Have no fear, though... this pickup is even better for contemporary heavy rock than the 204 and will cut through forests of distorted guitars with ease.

VERDICT

The 204 is decent introduction to the T-Bird experience; the 1004 is closer to the real deal, and justifies its higher price. You need to be fully aware of the built-in issues of weight and balance, but despite the drawbacks these are genuinely fun basses to play... and they'll look really cool when you're rocking out.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	19/20
Playability	15/20
Sound	17/20
Value for money	16/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	84%

Good for... A stylish bass with top-notch sounds for a wide variety of rock music

Look elsewhere... For a more versatile instrument

THE COMPETITION

EPIPHONE
Thunderbird IV

The Epiphone version of the reverse Gibson Thunderbird. Not the most adaptable bass, but a whole pile of fun

RRP: £229

GIBSON
Thunderbird IV

If you're in the market for a Thunderbird you have to check out the genuine article, with more warmth and solidity

RRP: £1199

FRET-KING
Blue Label Ventura Super 80

A piece of crazed genius with a nutty body shape and one P pickup, one J and a fat humbucker at the neck

RRP: £669

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The HT-1 is the perfect studio and practice valve amp. This fun-sized 1 Watt is packed with all the great tone and innovative features of the award-winning HT-5 and enough balls to satisfy. With patent-applied-for ISF (Infinite Shape Feature), speaker emulated output, stereo MP3/Line Input, plus an 8Ω speaker output it's the perfect excuse to play your guitar.

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Price: £351

Take one adaptable P/J bass, and Jaguarise it: could this be the perfect recipe for the affordable cool-looking must-have indie bass of 2011? Review by Gareth Morgan

Squier

Vintage Modified Jaguar Bass

By way of completing the triumvirate of new Vintage Modified basses from Squier, we're running our eyes over the Indonesian-made Vintage Modified Jaguar Bass. The VMJ's body is a scaled-up and slightly spikified version of the Jaguar guitar, originally released in 1962 and, in turn, inspired by the Bass VI from the previous year. The direct precursor is Fender's own Jaguar Bass, introduced in 2006 and favoured by, amongst others, Pino Palladino, currently on low-end duty with the Who. The Fender version had an alder body; the Squier is agathis, but otherwise it's identical - and it looks great... nostalgic, you might say, without being dated.

The body depth is around 41mm, and there's a ribcage chamfer along the back top edge and a forearm cut for comfort purposes. The lower horn is reduced to little more than a bulge, which makes zooming up to the topmost frets a cinch. The overall effect is slightly skewed, and the old-school three-ply tortoiseshell scratchplate and smoothly bevelled body edges work a treat. While it isn't as outwardly good-looking as the glamorous Jazz, there's certainly something going on that will appeal to the sensibilities of the discerning alternative-minded bassist.

In terms of 'Vintage' and 'Modified', there's more to back up the claim-in-the-name in the bolt-on neck. It's made of one piece of maple plus a rosewood skunk stripe and it feels very comfortable under the hand thanks to the classic 'C' contour. The finish is matt polyurethane, and the black headstock face mimics the colour-matching you'd find on the original Jaguar guitar. The headstock itself is well-recessed for a decent string break-angle over the synthetic bone nut, and the four chrome open-geared tuners have shamrock-shaped tuning keys. White pearloid block inlays on the rosewood fingerboard are a vintage-correct CBS-era detail and really suit the VMJ, while dot markers along the top edge are standard issue. The 20 medium jumbo nickel frets are expertly seated. Squier describes the bridge as 'a period correct 1960s vintage-style' unit, so it's the regular top-loading type, finished in chrome. It always looks a little flimsy but seems to do the required job without any fuss.

Electronics, pickups and controls are more 'modified'. The VMJ is completely passive, unlike the Fender Jaguar Bass,

The combination of block markers and a black headstock puts us in mind of the Coronado Bass. Nice

The agathis body is a touch on the heavy side, but balance is good. Finish is black, black or black

The precursor to the Squier VM Jaguar Bass is Fender's own Jaguar Bass, introduced in 2006. It looks great – nostalgic without being dated

FACTFILE

VINTAGE MODIFIED JAGUAR BASS

Description: Solidbody bass. Made in Indonesia

Price: £351.32

Build: Agathis body, C-shaped polyurethane-finish maple neck with 20 medium jumbo nickel frets on a rosewood fingerboard. Standard four-saddle bridge and standard open-gear tuners. Chrome hardware

Electrics: Passive with one Duncan Designed JB102B Hot Single-Coil Jazz Bass pickup and one Duncan Designed PB101 Split Single-Coil Precision Bass pickup. Two stacked concentric controls, each with Volume (inner) and Tone (outer)

Left hander: No

Finishes: Black only

Range Options: none

Scale length: 864mm/34"

Width of neck:
Nut 38mm
12th fret 56mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 20mm
12th fret 22.5mm

String spacing:
Nut 10mm
Bridge 19mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 2mm
12th fret bass 3mm

Weight: 4.2kg/9.24lbs

Contact: Fender GB&I
01342 331 700
www.squierguitars.com

THE COMPETITION

FRET-KING BLUE LABEL
Ventura Super 80 Bass

A genuinely kooky '60s-inspired bass giving solid passive sounds from a definitely bonkers array of three pickups

RRP: £669

DANELECTRO
63 Long Scale

It looks cheap and rather feels it, but that chiming Danelectro tone is pure class. It's light, different, and really enjoyable

RRP: £249

EKO
Kadett Series MM600

A genuinely odd Italian-flavoured single horn bass with a fizzy Music Man sound. Nobody else will have one

RRP: £229

and instead of two Jazz single-coils it has a P/J layout with one Duncan Designed JB102B Hot single-coil with ceramic magnets at the bridge and, further forwards, a Duncan Designed PB101 P-Bass pickup with Alnico 5 magnets. The controls have been both modified and vintage-ised, so you don't get pickup on/off, series/parallel and active/passive switches, nor quirky bass and treble rotary controls, just a pair of stacked concentric knobs, an idea originally used on the Jazz Bass from 1960-'62, where the inner knurled chrome control is Volume and the outer black one Tone. They sit on a vintage-correct chrome plate.

SOUNDS

There might be something a little left-field about the looks, but this isn't the case when it comes to the VMJ's sound. Full-on P/J mode produces a tone with a decent low-end bump and tasty growl. It hasn't got the serious thump of an active bass, but it's detailed and rich. The bridge pickup is juicier than the neck; there's a bright sheen to the sound, with the high edge uppermost in the mix. It's not overbearing, just crisp with a hint of nasality, and there's enough body on higher strings for practicality. It's pretty good overall, and although it's probably best suited for rock styles you might just get away with a bit of earthy funk.

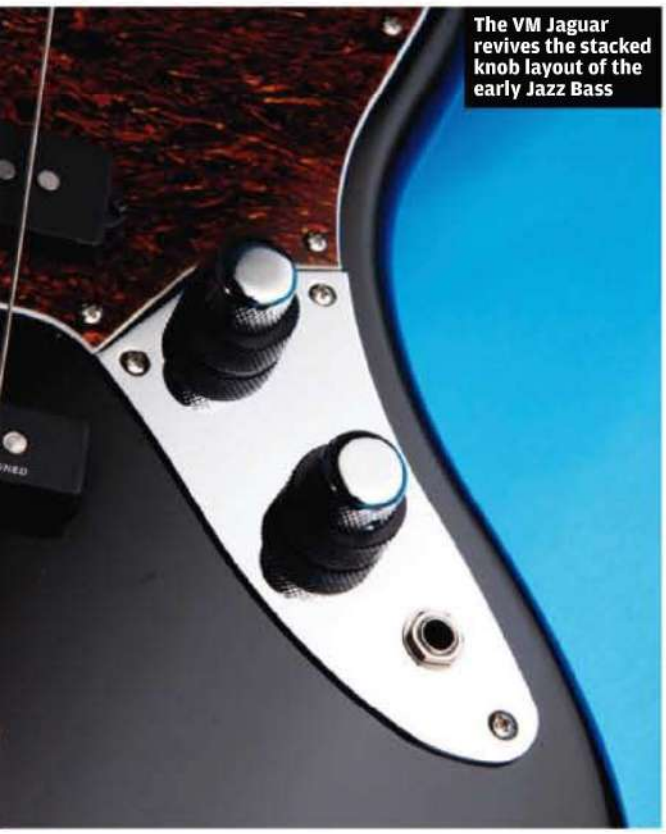
Selecting the neck pickup gives you something similar but with the emphasis on different ingredients. It's grittier and laden with the classic elements of a straight P-Bass... earthier, with a barking, aggressive edge to the bottom end. Notes have a rubbery core which give plenty of meaty substance to the midrange, and as with the full P/J setting, there's lots of body on the thinner strings. The treble is smoother with just a hint of snap - perfectly acceptable for melodic grooving or blues riffing.

The bridge pickup is brighter with a zingy high-mid clarity. On the lower strings the sound is crisp and not as burpy as you'd associate with single-coil bridge pickups. The output is high; you might need to dial in some bass EQ via your amp, but you won't have to tweak the gain.

Backing off the tone control sands down the note edges, giving you a more versatile, pop-oriented sound with very little fret-noise. It's smooth and polite on the neck pickup, and sits comfortably in the old school soul box. Both these options and the full P/J sound eventually end up as mushy, indistinct drones, although if you roll Tone slightly forwards with the latter you get a smooth, fat variation with just enough definition for general all-round use. There are more subtleties from different combinations of Tone levels. If the bridge pickup's tone is higher, the result is zingier; it's a smoother, more musical affair when the neck pickup's tone control dominates.

The passive P/J pickups give a more rock-friendly sound than the active J's on the Fender Jaguar bass

The Squier VM Jaguar is appealingly quirky, and the 'vintage modified' elements make it less complicated than the straight Fender version



The VM Jaguar revives the stacked knob layout of the early Jazz Bass

VERDICT

The VM Jaguar is appealingly quirky. The 'vintage modified' elements make it less complicated than the straight Fender version, and add a lot of class. This bass is really very playable, and tonally what you get is a decent array of clean passive sounds... and you can't ask for much more than that for your hard-earned £350.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	18/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	16/20
Value for money	17/20
Vibe	16/20
TOTAL	85%

Good for... A nice selection of surprisingly good passive sounds in a distinctive package

Look elsewhere... For more run-of-the-mill looks (you old bore) or the active option

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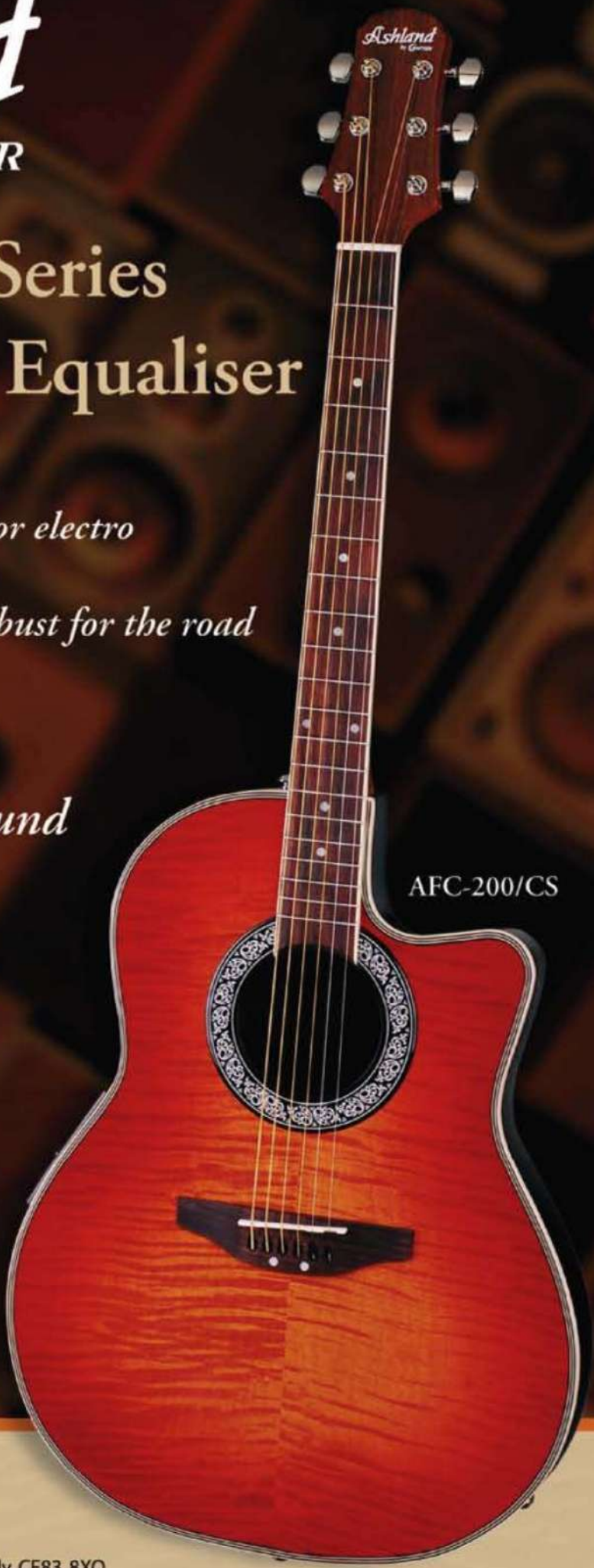

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Price: £1399

First Impressions: Squat and purposeful, a compact and businesslike cube

If you're looking for a meaty compact combo with extension cab capability for bigger gigs, then this little chunker is a strong American-made contender. Review by Gareth Morgan

Mesa Boogie

M3 Carbine 300W Combo

Mesa Boogie has been producing amps in Petaluma, California since 1969, where founder Randall Smith originally ran a small repair business modifying Fender combos. The first official Mesa Boogie - the Mesa 450 - was a bass amp, and the M3 Carbine combo is their latest low-end offering.

You get 300W of MOSFET power and a single 12AX7 valve housed in a squat, 22mm void-free Baltic birch plywood cab with near-cuboid dimensions of 481mm high, 491mm wide and 465mm deep. It has a sturdy black vinyl coat, Lexan corner protectors, detachable castors and side-mounted sprung handles, so transporting this 35kg/77lb lump is no hardship. Drivers comprise one 12" Neodymium Powerhouse speaker and one controllable 406 HF horn. The M3 also comes equipped with Boogie's Tri Port system, which basically means that there are triangular porting slots in three front corners.

The business of tone shaping is taken care of by a single row of chunky recessed control knobs. Gain, DI Level (pull for Pre EQ) and Master volume (pull for Mute) border a three-band EQ; Bass and Treble are active shelving-style controls, so they produce gentle, graded boosts/cuts of up to 20dB at 55Hz and 3.2kHz respectively. Boogie says tugging on the Bass dial (Pull Deep) unearths 'a warm rich sound' with a slower attack which is 'foundational for smaller groups'. The third EQ, Mid, is a passive-style boost-only offering, although by how much and where in the frequency spectrum it does it, we cannot say.

The back panel includes the usual suspects, namely an XLR DI Out with Ground/Lift switch, plus FX loop, Tuner Out and twin speaker out jack sockets.

The M3 offers 300W of MOSFET power plus a single 12AX7 valve and a 12" driver with a controllable horn

SOUNDS

With the EQ flat, the M3 delivers a well-realised sound. Treble is clean and unadulterated by high mid, with plenty of lively harmonics that give the tone a pleasingly natural feel. In the midrange it's an even response all the way - brooding without being too dark, defined without nasality - and the bass end is full with good definition and a decent snarl on the note edges. Activating the Deep option thickens your sound, and boosting Bass alongside fills acres of space with soulful warmth. It eventually gets woolly, but there are some good blues and soul sounds to be had. The Bass EQ on its own adds weight and impact to the versatile non-boosted sound, and dialling in Mid darkens matters, tightening up the notes and giving a snappier, more aggressive tone that'll appeal to contemporary rock fans. You don't really need to boost Treble with the HF driver on unless you want fret noise or you're going for an '80s hi-fi kind of thing, but ditch the horn and this control is on hand to add a crunchy edge or to help you cut through a muddy mix.

VERDICT

The M3 is rugged and sounds equally solid. The basic sound is high quality, and the variations - while not really radical - are practical for the real world. It has a tighter, funkier feel than its sister, the M6, which might help it appeal to more pop-oriented players. There's a question mark regarding its price against the competition, but it's hand-built in the USA and that always equates to quality and reliability... and it's a Mesa Boogie, which means a great deal to many people.

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	19/20
Versatility	16/20
Sound	17/20
Value for money	16/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	**85%**

Good for... A tight, solid, practical combo with a good range of easily accessible sounds

Look elsewhere... For more tonal variation or a more affordable alternative

FACTFILE

M3 CARBINE

Description: Single channel 300W 1x12" transistor/valve combo with one 12AX7 valve in the preamp stage. One 12" 4 Ohm Neodymium Powerhouse speaker and one 406 HF driver in a 22mm void-free Baltic birch plywood cabinet with front porting.
Made in USA

Price: £1399

Controls: Gain, Bass (pull for Deep), Mid, Treble, DI Level (pull for Pre EQ) and Master volume (pull for Mute) controls. Input, FX loop (with Bypass switch), Tuner Out, Mute (footswitch not supplied), twin Speaker Out jack sockets, XLR DI Out with Ground/Lift switch

Range Options: M3 300W head £1199, M3 300W rack-mountable head £1099, M6 Carbine 2x12" 600W combo £1699.99

Contact:
Westside Distribution
0141 248 4812
www.mesaboogie.com

THE COMPETITION

ASHDOWN
MAG C210T-300 EVO II 300W combo

The blue-trimmed Ashdown is a familiar sight in bassland. It's got a full-range sound and it's solid, reliable and inexpensive

RRP: £449

IBANEZ
Promethean P5110 250W combo

This recent mini-combo is super-portable and stuffed full of great sounds - and it kicks out more bottom end than it has any right to

RRP: £579

LANEY
Richter RB8 300W combo

Delivering a crunching 300W into a meaty 15" speaker and a switchable horn, this is an easy to use, wallet-friendly package

RRP: £385

www.downmagaz.com

Five minutes to showtime, and your tuner's dead. Fender has the answer

RRP: £39.59

Fender

GT-1000 Chromatic Green Tuner

In these environmentally aware times, Fender has released a tuner that's green in a way that goes deeper than just a paintjob. The clue is the large winder that dominates half the unit's front. Flipping it open reveals an arm that you wind to charge up the power cells lurking within, until a little light (green, of course) shows you that the tuner is ready to use. If you're an acoustic player then you use the built-in microphone; otherwise, the mandatory jack plug input will serve your needs.

We've grown used to digital units with multiple lights telling us how near we are to pitch, so the simple flat and sharp indicators seem a little less accurate, but they serve their purpose well and leave guitars correctly tuned - which is all you can ask, really. Fender has added a calibration button so you can match an instrument that might be out of standard pitch (we're guessing an old piano or something), and a flashlight... always handy.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	18/20
Useability	17/20
Rechargeability	20/20
Value for Money	18/20
Vibe	16/20
TOTAL	89%

Good for... general home tuning and having in your guitar case as an emergency back-up

Look elsewhere... for a unit specifically designed for pedalboard use

VERDICT

It's an eternal mystery, the way that guitar tuners often seem to suffer pre-gig battery demise far earlier than their plugged-in time should indicate. Though the GT-1000 isn't the most pin-point device on the market, the notion that it'll never, ever go dead on you is hugely tempting. Buy one today, and fling it in your gigbag.

Contact: Fender 01342 331700
Web: www.fender.co.uk

Apps! They're cheap and good. Once you've paid out for the phone, at least

RRP: £11.99

Amplitube 2

for iPhone/iTouch/iPad

It seems that the days of people playing in their bedrooms with large Marshall stacks turned up - or should we say down - to somewhere between 0 and 1 on the volume is slowly drawing to an end. In these more enlightened times we have digital modeling amps that can mimic these tones (and often do a better job at low volume) or even something as tiny as an app on your phone.

Amplitube is an example of this contemporary witchcraft, and it has recently been given a timely upgrade. The previous version featured an impressive collection of amps and pedals that you could play by simply plugging your guitar into an iRig connector (£29.99, and you'll still need to buy one) that then went into your iPhone. Nothing else. Simple, clean, small.

Those cool sounds are still available at the swish of a finger (there's lots of that involved to navigate to all the amp controls and virtual pedal dials), but you also get a recording capability and the chance to jam along with backing songs you import from your computer. It's pretty impressive that all this fits into something so small, although the cramped nature can get a bit fiddly.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	17/20
Playability	16/20
Sound	16/20
Value for Money	18/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	84%

Good for... a complete guitar rig in your pocket

Look elsewhere... if you find computers inherently frustrating

VERDICT

It probably won't be long until apps like this rule the world. It's not quite the full package yet, but you can see the potential.

Contact: ikmultimedia 0800 0934066
Web: www.ikmultimedia.com

PRIVATE COLLECTION

Working Man's Blues

Paul Brett has a lifelong fascination with early American steel-string flat top guitars. Lars Mullen views just a sample of his amazing acquisitions

Singer, songwriter, session guitarist, TV and record producer, engineer and journalist... Paul Brett's CV reads like a musical encyclopaedia, and he's also an expert on the subject of pre-war acoustic guitars – a passion that goes right back to the 1960s.

Paul's vintage acoustic voyage began in a band called Elmer Gantry's Velvet Opera, where he played guitar alongside the late John Joyce. The two friends would trawl London's junk shops together, relying on their noses and instinct to pick out bargains. Their timing was perfect: in those pre-collector days, electrics from the '50s and '60s were available for a couple of hundred pounds, while acoustics could often be picked up for a song.

'That was the time,' Paul affirms. 'There were some wonderful acoustics around. A Gibson L-00, for example, might go for a fiver! Nobody knew that there would be any kind of rising market value. That's all changed, and with so much more information available it's now known that certain guitars had a historical association with certain players, and the whole thing has grown into a big international market. I try to avoid being caught up in the tsunami of craziness that surrounds certain guitars. It's especially bad with some solidbody electrics... they can be valued in the millions, but they're often only worth half that when it comes to selling again.

'As we came across more old guitars, John passed the acoustic bug on to me. He began to develop a wonderful way of playing 12-string blues in the manner of players like Leadbelly and Blind Willie McTell... in fact, he was probably the only person in the UK at the time playing in that style. He also began to develop his skills as a luthier and restorer until he reached a very high level. He would renovate these old guitars and sometimes sell them on to me, and that's how my collection began to evolve.

'I've never bought guitars to resell at a profit, and I've never sold one to buy another. Though they've maintained their value, the real interest in these wonderful acoustics for me is the fact they were around for so long before the electric models and that they have such a history to tell.

'A lot of my guitars are from the 1920s and 1930s. I feel it's really important to preserve that time-line, and my special interest is guitars that are ideal for blues and fingerstyle playing.'

Plain but huge sounding, this is the type of 12-string Stella played by folk star Leadbelly

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Left, a 1930s Stella 'Decalcomania'; right, a beautifully inlaid late-19th century Washburn

Below, a pearloid-fingerboard Gibson LC Century and a 'half vine inlay' Stella from the '30s

The first guitar Paul shows us is a 12-string Stella grand concert - a model forever enshrined by Leadbelly and Blind Willie McTell. 'This dates from the 1930s,' Paul explains. 'It's a big guitar with a voluminous 12-string voice, more akin to a travelling piano. You couldn't say it was a work of art, but this is how a real 12-string should sound! It's richer in the trebles than most modern guitars, which tend to just clang and rattle. The 27.5" scale contributes to an really pure low end, especially when tuned down to B like Leadbelly.

'Some of the very early pioneering rural blues players used guitars just like this. Brands like Stella were all they could afford, and they were available for a few dollars from general stores. I think this is how the blues was created - on these cheap working men's guitars, as opposed to some of the more expensive models available at that time.

'Stella acoustic guitars were built by the Oscar Schmidt Company of New Jersey, and their range went from inexpensive all-birch parlour guitars to elaborately-appointed and impressive-sounding high-end models. They were all were noted for their trumpet-like sound projection.

'The Stella 12-string dates from the 1930s. It's a big guitar with a voluminous voice, like a travelling piano'

'This 1930s Stella Decalcomania has a back, sides and top of solid birch. It has a mellow, jazzy sound. This is a pretty guitar with inlaid gold sparkle purfling, ivoroid bound top and soundhole and elaborate floral decals, and they're quite scarce. This tailpiece is common on a lot of Stella models, as is the half-sized scratchplate. The Stella with the half vine inlay on the fingerboard is another fairly rare one from the same period. It's a lovely fingerpicking blues guitar.

'The Oscar Schmidt Company also produced guitars under the "C Bruno" brand. My Bruno looks quite similar to a Stella, with its pyramid bridge and mother of pearl Tree Of Life inlay.

'Another guitar with intricate detail on the fingerboard is this rare Sovereign, a top of the line Stella, probably one of the rarest in the whole range. It's the exact same model that blues legend Son House played.

'Antonio Galiano was one of the main luthiers at the Oscar Schmidt factory, and this 1930s Galiano is one of the guitars he made after branching out by himself. It still has a typically Stella pyramid bridge. A lot of the early ones didn't have headstock logos; many went out just with paper labels stuck inside. Possibly back then they didn't even envisage that their guitars would last 100 years, so to find one with a label is a bonus.'

Next to the Galiano is a Gibson LC Century, built to celebrate the Century Of Progress exhibition held in Chicago in 1933. 'They made two instruments - a mandolin and this 14-fret flat top guitar with a pearloid headstock and fingerboard. The position markers are rosewood with notched diamond inlays, and it's built of figured maple with triple binding. I've replaced the tuners as the plastic buttons fell apart like a lot of the early Gibson ones do, but it's a good example of a great-looking instrument.'

Left, a high-end Son House style Sovereign; right, a C Bruno with fabulous pearl inlay

Above, a red sunburst Galiano and a spruce and mahogany Wurlitzer, built by CF Martin in 1922

Private Collection

Two stunning Harmonys, a Supertone (left) and a glorious 1920s Red Bird

Below left: a Kalamazoo KG-11. Right, a classic mid-'30s Gibson L-00

Above: a 1930s mahogany-topped Gibson L-0 and a 1927 Harmony Supertone with 'aeroplane' bridge

'The Gibson L-00 was bought for a fiver off a sax player called One Lung 'Arry in the 1960s'

Paul is a strong believer that old guitars are still totally viable musical instruments today. 'A lot of these are in superb condition and they've certainly stood the test of time,' he points out. 'I get a little uptight when people say they weren't built to last, as opposed to new guitars. We won't know if the modern ones will still be in one piece in 100 years, but here we are today playing these originals, some of which are from the early 1900s... they're absolutely immaculate, and look like they'll be good for another 50 years.'

Next up is a parlour-sized Washburn from the late 1800s. 'This is wonderful,' Paul enthuses. 'It's a maple guitar, including the top, and the binding and the body construction are all as strong as the day it was built. The sound has mellowed really beautifully with age.

'Harmony was one of the biggest manufacturers of the '30s. I've yet to see another Red Bird like this, and this Harmony Supertone is also a bit of a rarity. Both these are now over 80 years old and still perform beautifully. Chords just sing out, and lead lines really project. Back then, of course, there wasn't the wood problem we have today, so exotic tonewoods were plentiful. Harmony also produced this Supertone in 1927 to commemorate Charles Lindberg's non-stop flight from New York to Paris. It's a stunning guitar with an aeroplane-design bridge.'

Next, more Gibsons. 'For me, Gibson's acoustic heyday came in the early 1930s and '40s with guitars like the L-0, L-00 and LC Century,' Paul affirms. 'My mid-'30s Gibson L-00 was one of John Joyce's finds. Some say these are the best acoustic blues guitar ever made. I've used it on many of my acoustic albums. John bought it off a sax player we called One Lung 'Arry for a fiver in the '60s! He restored it and then sold it to me for 20 quid. I don't think I was ripped off, as it's now worth between $4000 and $5000!

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Private Collection

'This L-0 from the same period is all-mahogany, including the top, so it does have a distinct sound – quite projective, but a little harsher in the trebles. This one has quite a lot in common with a flat-top L-1, and it's a little unusual with its bound top and back and stunning natural finish. Judging by the condition, this one must have been kept in a closet by someone from a rich family! There was a call for these guitars in the cities, but not so much out in the rural areas, though a few fell into the hands of the African-American country boys.

'These next two are supposedly the Robert Johnson models. There's one picture of him playing a 1928 sunburst version of this 1926 Gibson L-1. This was the first year for the fixed bridge on Gibson acoustics, and this was their earliest flat top catalogue model. This has a carved maple back and sides, and it's pristine.

'This 1930s 00-sized Kalamazoo KG-14 was the other one Robert Johnson was photographed with. His guitars are all a little shrouded in mystery. A supposedly original Johnson guitar came up for auction a while ago, valued at $6,000,000, but it looked new... surely his would have been a little rough around the edges! I'm always sceptical about these stories. What proof do we have? A lot of these dear old guys didn't have a pot to pee in, and it's obvious they were dressed up in suits and handed guitars for photo sessions.

Robert Johnson guitars: left, a 1926 Gibson L-1; right, a Gibson-made Kalamazoo KG-14

'This Kalamazoo KG-11 was made in Gibson's Michigan factory but sold to non-Gibson dealers. It's a fine blues guitar with a spruce top and mahogany body, and a little unusual with the larger lower bout. I love to play fingerstyle on these instruments. They're extremely light and they have ladder bracing and a very thin layer of lacquer which helps make them vibrate like a snare drum. To me, they have this sensitive side – you can actually hear and feel a sense of time in every note or chord.

This 1938 Oahu was built for lap style playing but converted to a round neck

'A lot of the old guys didn't have a pot to pee in. They were dressed in suits and handed guitars for photos'

'My Oahu was built in 1938, and it's quite intriguing. It was originally built for slide, but the square neck has been reprofiled for normal playing. Slide players needed volume and sustain, and the jumbo sycamore body and spruce top make it really loud. At $98 it was an expensive guitar for the period.

'The figuring on some of these bodies is really spectacular. This rare Weymann from 1925 has an 0-sized body of beautiful flamed mahogany with a spruce soundboard. It's another loud one with a full, warm sound. Weymann ran for several years, but like many guitar makers, including Oscar Schmidt, they went down thanks to the Wall Street Crash in 1929.

'Regal from Chicago made some fancy models with decorative decals. This little concert model with the pearloid fingerboard and capped headstock comes from the mid-'30s. They also employed a smaller scratchplate, which in reality is more of a fingerplate than a plectrum guard. It's audibly a little sharper, so it's ideal for slide blues. Guitars like this are wonderful for recording – they're so pure and natural. There's no need to compensate with compressors or the like... I just need a couple of high quality microphones and the instrument does the rest.'

Paul keeps all his guitars in secure storage, and getting them all to his house was quite an operation – especially with items like his huge Gibson harp guitar. 'I'm in the middle of restringing this one, and I've had to source the strings from the USA,' he reveals. 'Gibson produced harp guitars between 1913 and the late 1920s, so this one isn't far off 100 years old, and it's in museum condition. Orville Gibson himself developed the first carved top and backs, and this one shows some beautiful woodwork around the edges of the spruce top. It's a massive 20" across the lower bout. Harp guitars were used a lot in the Gibson guitar orchestras that were popular in that era, probably as part of the rhythm section, ➔

A pearloid-fingerboard decal-decorated Regal from the mid-'30s and a fine 1925 Weymann

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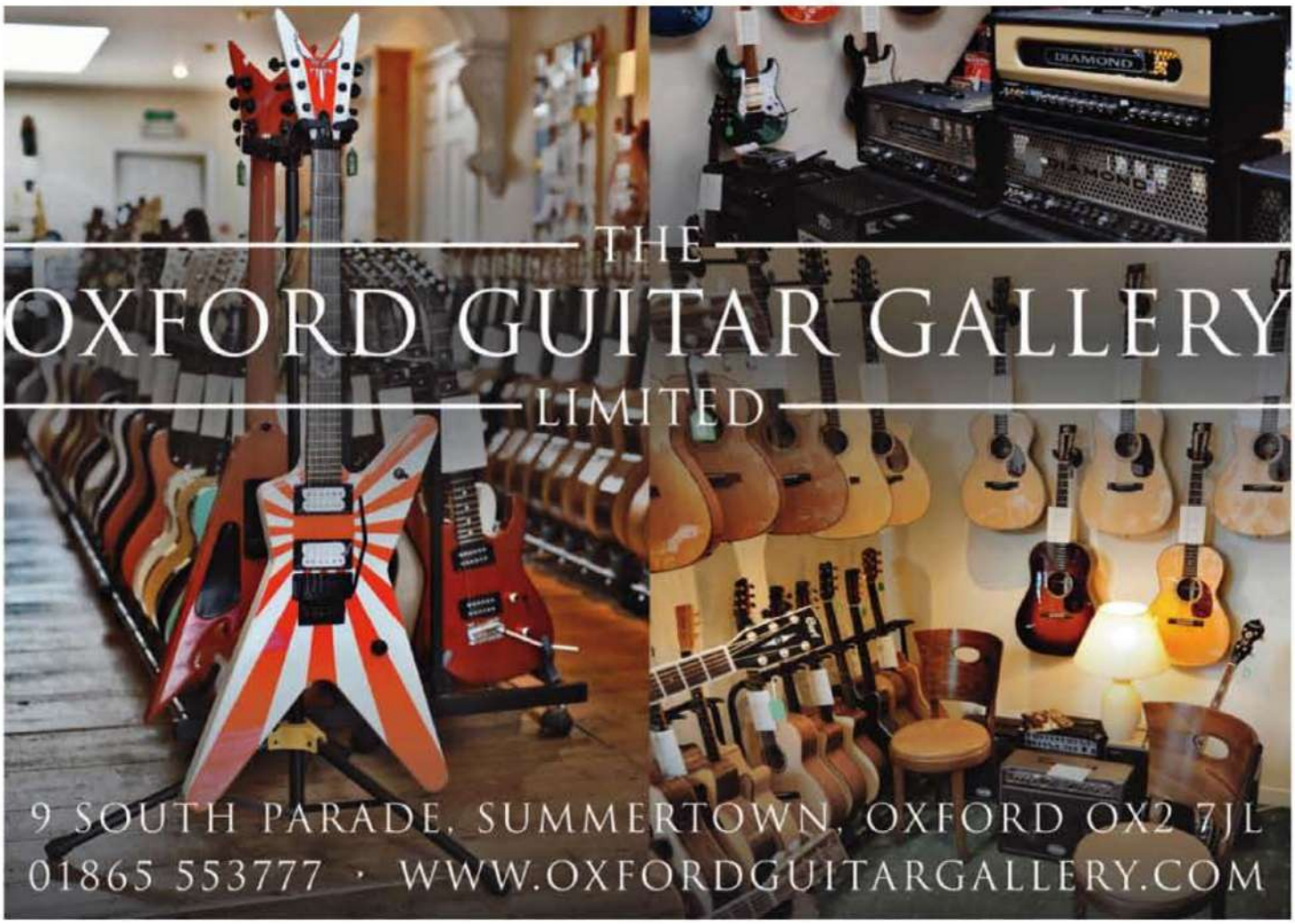

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Below, a huge Gibson harp guitar, an innovative plastic guitar by Mario Maccaferri and a doubleneck Stella Sovereign with bass and treble necks

with the 10 sub-bass strings - which are tuned chromatically - played in a boom-chucka-boom style along with chords on the conventional neck. Round the back we have what must have been one of the earliest experimental truss rod designs, adjustable outside the body via a steel bar connected between the body and the headstock. At $248 dollars, it was big investment back then.

What's this... a *plastic* guitar? 'Ah, the plastic Mac,' grins Paul. 'It's a G30, built by Maccaferri during the 1950s. Because they were constructed from plastic they didn't really catch on, and were probably just looked upon as a gimmick. But they're very underrated, and players and collectors now regard them as a quality instrument and totally unique in design and concept. The company actually dedicated a whole factory to making them, and they had some innovative ideas. The bracing is wood, and though the sound can be a little trebly, there's more warmth and bass in this plastic guitar than in a lot of archtops. They're better for lead than for rhythm. It has this great little button at the bottom of the tailpiece where you insert a screwdriver to tweak the action. I have this one playing like a dream.'

A pair of Stellas finish off today's session, and both are rather unusual, to say the least. 'The 1920s Stella Sovereign twin-neck is a conventional six-string and a six-string fretless bass. This one has had a pickup fitted under the bridge. The reversed headstock may have influenced Leo Fender in years to come.

'Another fascinating guitar from Oscar Schmidt is this seven-string Stella Toneharp made for the ED Wilbur Co in Schenectady, New York. It dates from 1912 and it has had a very early lap steel conversion, which really was way ahead of its time. The push-buttons in the panel on the soundboard activated a clever cam-operated tailpiece which in turn raised or lowered the pitch - rather like a pedal steel, only on an acoustic guitar with seven strings! It was probably tuned in open G, perhaps DGDDGBD. I've managed to track down somebody who has the plans for it, and I'm trying to source the original buttons.

'It's definitely got a lot harder to find high quality examples. Ebay can offer some nice bargains, but you really have to know exactly what you're doing and what you're looking at. While some modern acoustics from individual makers can run into the thousands, I'd personally prefer to track down a beautiful original... steeped with history, with a great story to tell.'

A seven-string Stella Toneharp with rare auto-tuning mechanism

For more information see the Guitar Museum at www.paulbrettguitarist.co.uk

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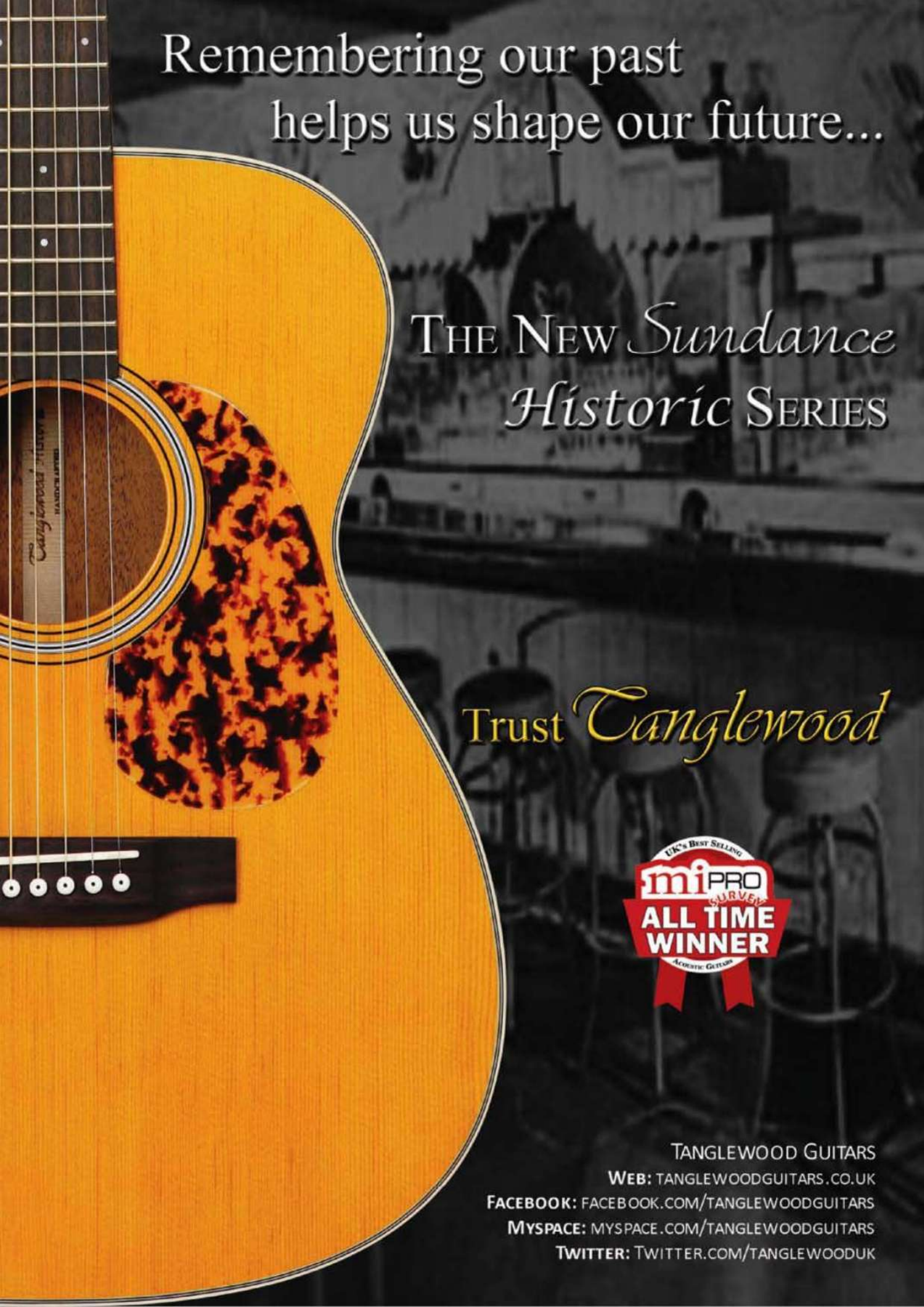
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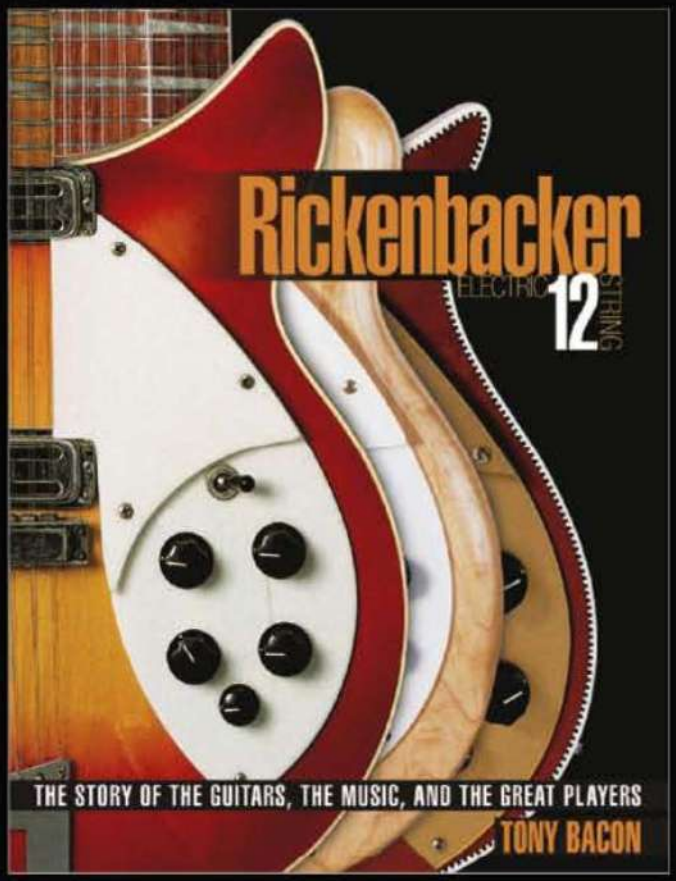

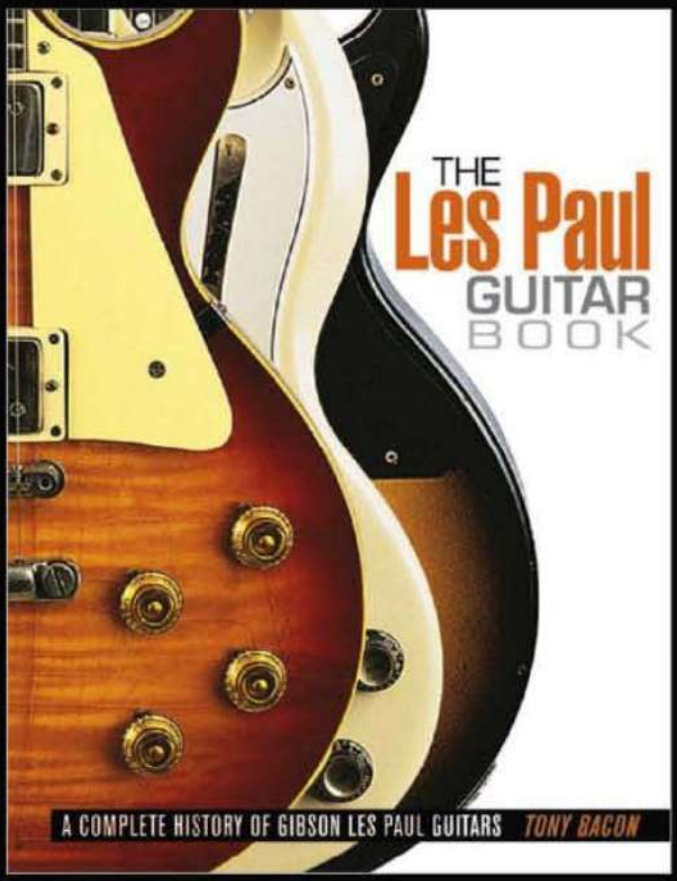

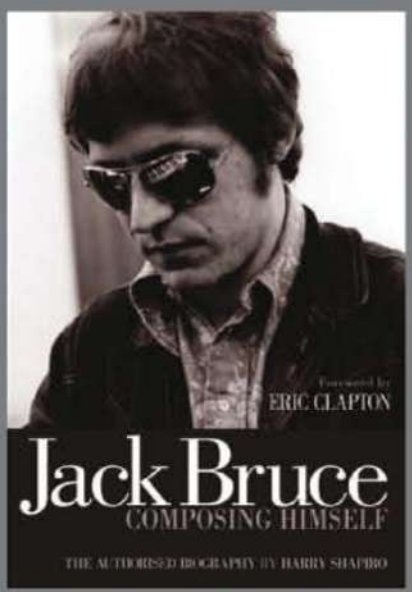

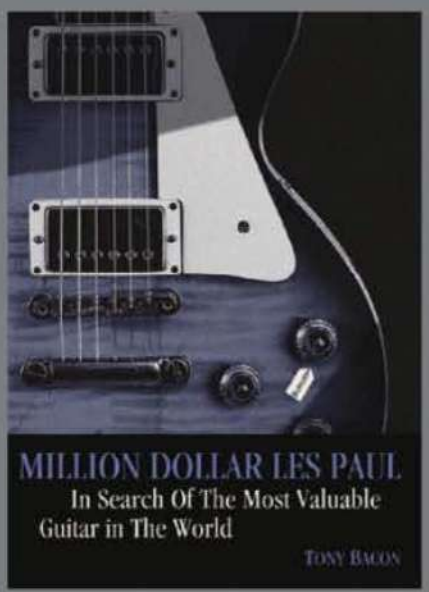

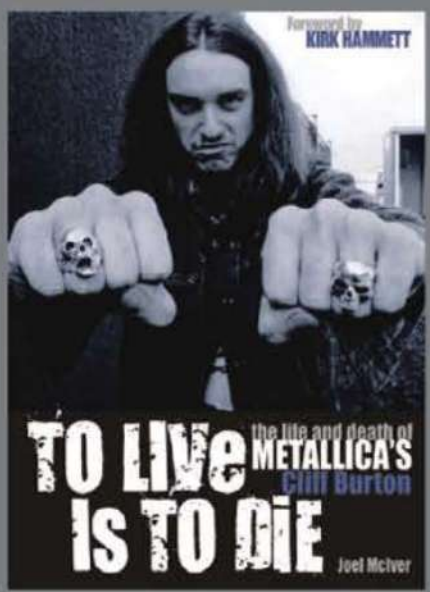

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Next of Tin

Throughout the 1970s New York's Electro-Harmonix company produced a dizzying arrays of effects pedals, each of them lightly stroked by the finger of insanity. Phil Harris delves into his collection and decides on his favourite

Having featured Electro-Harmonix pedals back in the May 2008 issue, I was gently taken to task by some readers for not putting in certain pedals, including the most famous one of all... the Big Muff. Apologies for the wait, but I'm very happy to correct this oversight now. In fact, I could do a number of columns on the Electro-Harmonix range - or just one on the Big Muff alone. After all, it's the most iconic pedal in an iconic range: I've made it my business to own so many for my hire company because guitar players of all ages and styles know about them, use them and adore them - all the way from soul players to Van der Graaf Generator.

In my search for these stompboxes over the years, especially the lesser-spotted ones, I've come into contact with many Electro-Harmonix fans. Most of them are wonderful people. However, maybe it's the saucy, edgy nature of some of the pedal names E-H uses, but I have met more than one fanatic with a certain 'out there' mentality (and I'm talking from the position of a man who's spent all his working life dealing with musicians). What do I mean? Well, I'll only say that there are a couple that I wouldn't trust to stand behind me on a train platform as the train pulled into the station... just in case.

When Mu-trons and MXR pedals came along, many predicted the demise of Electro-Harmonix. But though they are housed in a bent piece of tin, they can more than hold their own

Still, the pedals themselves are worthy of devotion. When the likes of Mu-trons and MXRs came along with those fancy cases - so indestructible that if a tractor rode over them, only the tractor would get hurt - many predicted the demise of Electro-Harmonix. But despite the fact that they were housed in a bent piece of tin that a kiddie's tricycle could flatten, once you plugged them in they could more than hold their own.

There a few things I'd warn you to steer clear of; I'm not a big fan of their wahs or volume pedals, and I believe there are better products out there. But no brand has a 100 per cent success rate, and rather than focus on the below-par five per cent, let's concentrate on the enduring brilliance of the Electro-Harmonix range.

Some of these old pedals are hard to track down, but you shouldn't have to pay silly money to own something that really could revolutionise your sound. Happy hunting.

1973 Electro-Harmonix Bassballs

This pedal adds a real driving undercurrent of sonic sediment to your bass sound. It goes so low that a lot of what it delivers isn't actually audible to the human ear: if there are any lizards in the vicinity when a Bassballs is going off full tilt, they must get really annoyed. Paul McCartney put one of these to great use during his time in Wings, and as you can tell from the condition of this particular unit, it's had a few hooves come down on top of it over the years. Not a lot of people specifically ask for it, mind; they just ask for something that can provide some rumble, and I recommend the Bassballs in the certain knowledge they're going to love it. How can you not fall for something that can give you sounds that are a cross between a Sid James-style growl and a horror film soundtrack? This is one of those Electro-Harmonix units that are a bit thin on the ground, so if you ever see one on your travels, snap it up without hesitation - you won't be disappointed.

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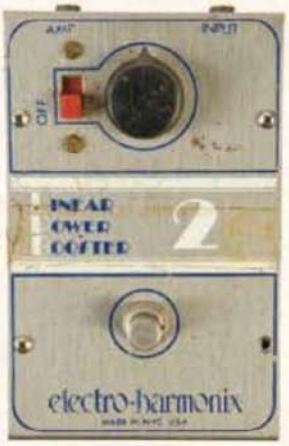
Hooked on Classics



1975 Electro-Harmonix LPB 2

I used to use the first version of the Linear Power Booster when I was playing guitar professionally because it gave my sound a total kick up the backside. If you want to go from conventional loudness and distortion to something that gives you and your audience a full-frontal lobotomy in a fraction of a second, then the original LPB 1 is your boy. Eardrums weren't made for what that unit can do: it could make Bob Marley sound like thrash metal. This LPB 2 can deliver that, but it also has more width and frequency to play with – you can still go for the jugular, but there are more options for affecting the bass, top and general push. Personally, I recommend you get a really clean Tele sound and rough it up with this LPB 2 (and I'm talking roughing up with a rasp rather than smooth-grade sandpaper). You'll feel as though you're channelling the forces of nature as you shift some earwax. At the £50 to £70 range, which is what you should expect to pay for an LPB 2 of this vintage, it's tremendous value.

1975 Electro-Harmonix Screaming Tree

This is my favourite Electro-Harmonix pedal of them all. Don't get me wrong, I love a lot of them, but this treble booster wins because I would use it all the time in some shape or form. I actually started off with the Screaming Bird, the Tree's little cousin, purchased in Top Gear from Sid Bishop, who was – and remains – one of the most knowledgeable people on guitars I've ever had the fortune to meet. I used this in the same way that Rory Gallagher and Brian May used a Rangemaster into the normal channel of their Vox AC30s. Despite my admiration for the Rangemaster, the Screaming Tree gets my vote. The key thing in its favour for me is the fact that it's a sensitised unit. Not only does it boost the treble, but it also magnifies all other aspects of the sound – you can even hear your nails on the strings. You don't have to get too clever with it... just put it on and put the dial around halfway into the amp's Normal channel and you can get everything from Clapton and Thin Lizzy to classic Leslie West. It's got the kind of zing that not even a lemon can provide.

1978 Electro-Harmonix Frequency Analyzer

This ring modulator is for those who want to indulge in audio extra-terrestrial travelling. To go through the knobs: Shift dictates how much wackiness you want, Fine allows you to select the extent you want your sound to be or not be in tune (the latter is great for Dalek impressions), and Blend allows you to put it all together. This is one serious outer-worldly pedal, suitable for those who wear tie-dyed T-shirts and bandannas. I've got other pedals of this kind from other makers, such as the Lovetone Ring Stinger, and they're excellent, but none of them have that 'skin of your teeth' quality; with this pedal you really feel like you're careering along. My favourite guitar/amp setup to use in conjunction with this Frequency Analyzer is a Fender Strat into an old blackface Fender Twin Reverb. If Johnny Marr and Andy Summers don't already have one of these, they should get one; it would be a stompbox they would really embrace. If you could get them to wear a tie-dyed T-shirt and a bandanna, that would be a bonus.

1973 Electro-Harmonix Big Muff

Finally, the main event. This really is the fuzz of a lifetime – you've heard a Big Muff on so many records, I won't even bother to list them here. Of all the Big Muff variants (Little Big Muff and so on) this 1973 three-knob incarnation is the '59 Les Paul of the bunch. The tone knob alone is worth the £200 or so you'll be paying for this pedal; it has so much control and range, and you can go from smooth-as-silk fuzz to the exact opposite. Apart from its many qualities, one of the reasons why the Big Muff made its way into so many hearts and on to so many boards is simple timing. Back in the early '70s people were looking for something extra; top-level players, such as Uriah Heep's Mick Box, wanted to really rock out, while small club players weren't after distortion so much as sustain and extra volume (remember, in those days hardly any amps came with a master volume). At the risk of sounding crude, who in their right mind is going to turn down a Big Muff? It was, remains, and forever shall be the best of its kind.

PRIVATE COLLECTION

Crave On

Stephen Dale Petit mulls over the guitars that took him from busking to the forefront of the UK blues resurgence. Interview by Rik Flynn

Until recently, the blues had its tail forced between its legs. It had once again become the Latin of musical languages: something respected by everyone just as long as it wasn't tampered with, frozen forever in its golden years like a faded snapshot of Muddy Waters, Albert King or John Lee Hooker. The more audacious artists who refused to cooperate were seen almost as hobbyists, pretenders bashing out pale recreations of the masters. It took Clapton and the Bluesbreakers to smash the snobbery in the '60s, and this time around it's falling to the hardy few to change those entrenched opinions.

US-born Stephen Dale Petit was one of the frontiersmen that chose to man up. His 2008 debut *Guitararama* brought the blues to a new generation: respectful to the blueprint, yet aping nobody whatsoever. On its release it went into the top 10 of the HMV Blues Chart, sandwiched neatly between two Robert Johnson albums, thus illustrating exactly what Petit was up against. 'When I came over to the UK I wanted to do a blues thing and quickly realised it was a joke, really,' says Petit. 'It was almost like a relative who'd somehow shamed the whole family.'

It follows, then, that the new face of UK blues should be someone who has fought a few battles himself. In search of the holy grail of 'the deal', a tenderfooted Petit was seduced into making a pop-rock album and played out an all-too-familiar story, eventually hitting a dead end. Instead of giving up, Petit diversified and found the perfect outlet for his reimagining of a heavily-cloaked genre... busking the blues on the London Underground.

'I didn't really want to do it, so what I did was kind of remind myself that all the blues guys had busked,' remembers Petit. 'I treated it with the same respect I would if I was playing an ordinary gig. It could be really dangerous down there, though. Once I had to find a bottle, break it and threaten to glass somebody to get them to back off my guitars!'

Petit knew it was only a matter of time before his genre of choice was once

Left, a Gibson L-4CES; right, a blonde Gibson ES-135, a late model with stoptail and no f-holes

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Petit and '65 Firebird VII reissue: 'I gravitated towards it because it was kind of an untapped guitar'

'I choose guitars that inspire me to play, but it's almost as if they play me. You just get out of the way'

again deemed palatable and welcomed back, and he was more than ready when it finally happened. He's now rubbing shoulders with guitar legends: his special guest for a recent countrywide jaunt was Mick Taylor, whose slide guitar also features on his new album; he's fronting his own appeal to save the legendary 100 Club; he's selling the records he always wanted to make; and, most importantly for our purposes today, he has a fine collection of guitars at his disposal.

'I suppose I try to choose guitars that inspire me to play, but really, it's almost as if they play me,' muses Petit. 'You sort of get out of the way, and let the guitar speak.'

Gibsons have always played a big part in Petit's life, ever since his dad bought him an SG Special. Although he's got (whisper it) a Strat, he chose not to bring it out for the photos. 'I liked the tone and I liked the shapes of Gibsons,' he explains. 'I always thought Fenders were a bit cheaper-sounding, a bit twangy, a bit plasticky, a bit metallic. They didn't sound like an instrument quite as much.'

So what turned Petit into such a fervent Gibson junkie? 'Eric Clapton. He was the very first person to play a Les Paul through a Marshall,' says Petit. 'That's something that's overlooked. For the Bluesbreaker period and during most of the Cream period - if not all of it - he was out there. He was a genius. He was pioneering in all sorts of areas that are taken for granted now. He was mad, bad and dangerous to know! The best way for me to describe it is he was a punk... with virtuosity.'

Petit's two-tier pedalboard with true bypass looper. He put his 135 through the E-H Hog to record *California*

Although Petit's debut *Guitararama* featured a host of guitars from a '77 Les Paul reissue to a stunning Gibson L-4CES, it was his ES-135 (bought off the shelf in Denmark Street) that led the way and takes pride of place on the cover of that album. It's still one of his go-to guitars both live and in the studio. 'I tend to bring the 135 out on tour because it's kind of the workhorse,' Petit details. 'On stage, when you're playing at serious speed and volume, it's just fantastic for sustained notes - it catches fire in a really organic kind of way. It's as if you're experiencing it just as much as the audience. It allows you to participate in a different way, because it's got this semi-acoustic body with

the f-holes covered so you get to resonate with it and allow it to develop. With a solid guitar, it's a known quantity. You have to coax the 135 a bit more, and you get so much in return for that. It's quite majestic.'

The 135 can be heard on *California* (a version of *California Love* by Tupac Shakur and a tune borrowed from Joe Cocker's *Woman To Woman*), one of the more unexpected tracks on the new record, charged through his Electro-Harmonix HOG pedal. 'I've lived with that song for a long time, so it's not that surprising to me,' says Petit. 'I just say if people can't hear the blues in that song then I don't know what to do!'

Stephen Dale Petit's Les Paul reissues: a '54 Black Beauty, a '59 sunburst, a '77 reissue and a limited edition '68 Goldtop

For his new album *The Crave*, the ES-135 shared the limelight with a cherished new Firebird VII, heard on pretty much every cut as his mainstay soloing guitar. 'I gravitated towards it because I thought it was kind of an untapped guitar,' admits Petit. 'I'm aware that finding your voice as a player involves all sorts of things, so having something with a unique tone is really, really important. The Firebird's my failsafe. It shows up on most of the album because it's got such astonishing tone.' Petit also reached for his '59 Les Paul reissue for his last record, but it appears his newfound love has muted that guitar's appeal. 'What I used to go for with the '59 is being provided by the Firebird now,' he says, surveying it. 'It really is quite special.'

But although Petit isn't enamoured of Fender guitars, isn't it ironic that he's chosen the Firebird as his favoured axe – a guitar that Gibson drew up to compete against the Stratocaster in the first place?

'Well, it's got Strat areas,' ponders Petit. 'Especially when you get into the middle pickup, where you've got similar characteristics to a Strat set halfway between pickups, but it's got more substance to it. Even when it's thin, there's something more to it. It's not as tinny.'

'The Firebird's my failsafe. It shows up on most of the album because it's got such astonishing tone'

On the bench: a soon-to-be metallic red SG Custom

As we can tell by the guitars lined up before us, Petit certainly appreciates a looker, and the Firebird definitely matches up in the eye candy stakes. Gibson originally commissioned car designer Ray Dietrich to design the guitar, and cars seem to be a recurring theme.

'The custom blue finish Firebird is one of a kind,' Petit beams. 'Eric Clapton had a metallic blue Ferrari... it was beautiful, and to tell the truth, that's what made me go for that metallic blue.' He's had it custom built to suit his exacting specs. 'The neck has been scanned from my 1977 Les Paul,' says Petit. 'The wiring is different, as well. They've got it wired through the tone, which is a different ohmage on the potentiometers. I'm not coming through a normal volume pot – it's coming through a tone pot. Sometimes there's no difference and sometimes there is, depending on which model. In this instance, there is a difference.'

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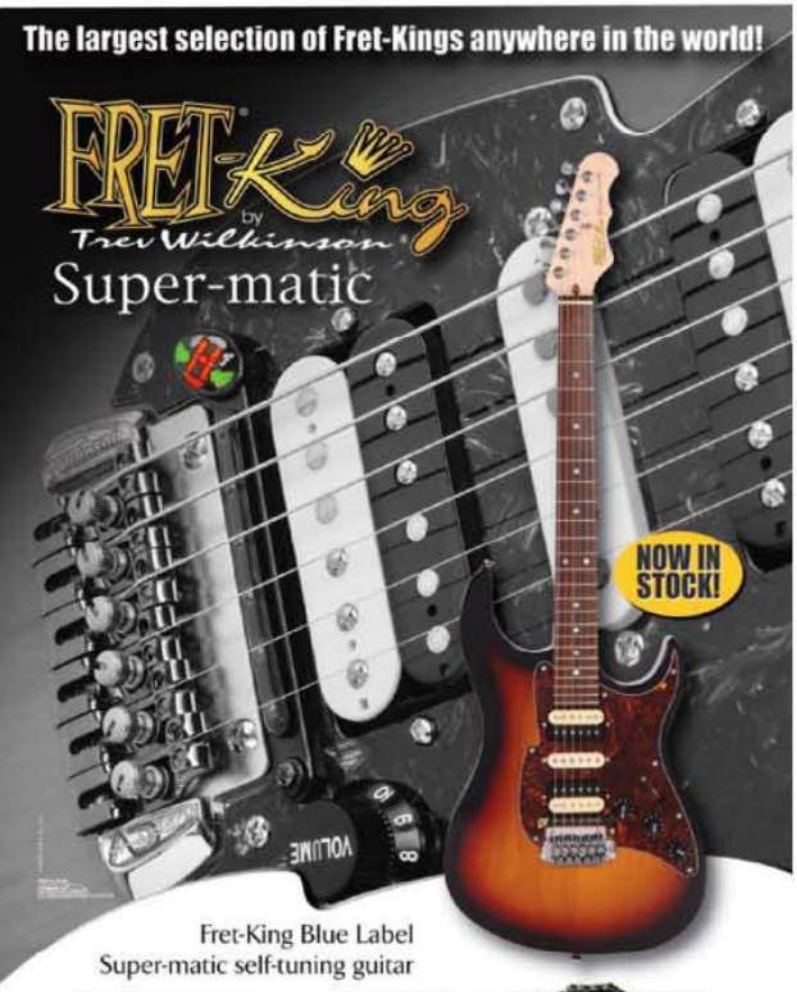

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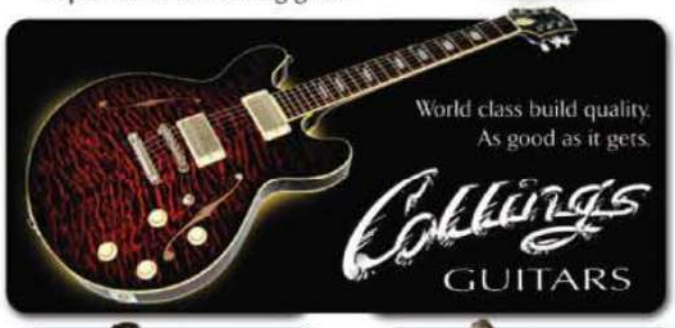

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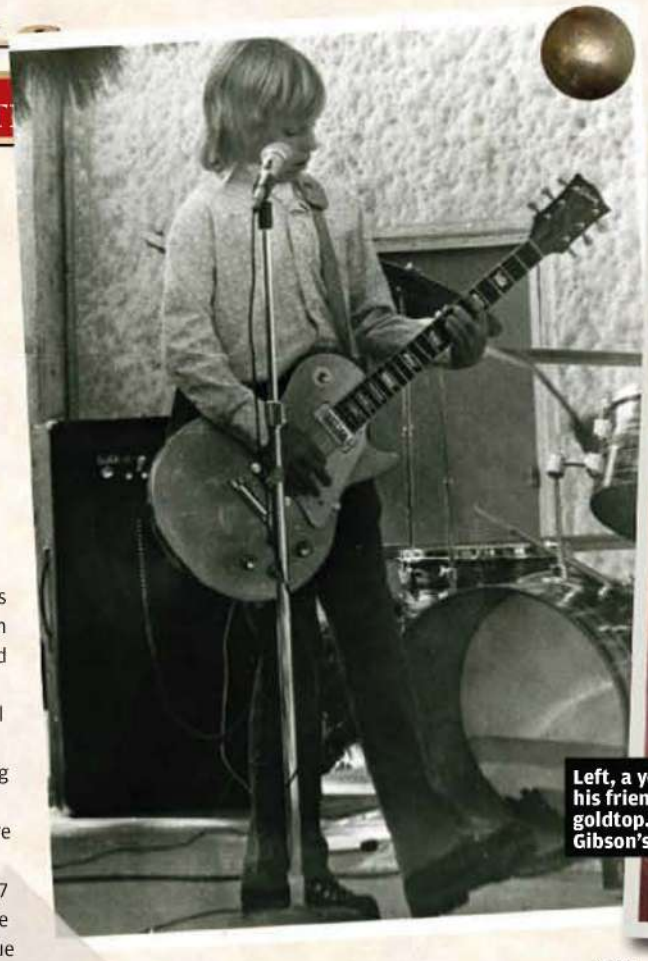

Left, a young Petit plays on his friend's Gibson Les Paul goldtop. Right: the Playboy Gibson's satin 'robe' cover

And what is that difference? 'Mojo,' he clarifies, laughing. 'I don't know, precisely! We're starting to examine it, because I want some of the characteristics to carry through to the new custom SG I'm having built. We're measuring the ohmage on the pickups. I don't necessarily want to recreate the Firebird... I want a different instrument that has another dimension to it. That's what I'm aiming for. A combination of what goes on on the fretboard, the electrics and the playability as well.'

Petit is closely monitoring the progress of this latest acquisition. 'It's coming from Nashville,' he enthuses. 'It's a metallic red '63 SG reissue. I'm bringing along a block of mahogany painted for reference. It will have an ebony fretboard, gold Grovers and a Burstbucker II at the neck. It's going to have two pickups, of course, but I'm still deciding on the bridge pickup. They're also going to do the special neck profile scan, and again it'll be the same as the '77 Les Paul.' And will this be the sound of the next record? 'I think so... although the blue Firebird is going to be hard to beat!'

Left to right: Martin D28-12, a Gibson Dove used for writing and recording, and a Danelectro baritone employed for slide

Among Petit's selection of Les Pauls, the Goldtop Ltd Edition Deluxe '68 Reissue holds a place close to his heart. It's a replica of another guitar he remembers from his childhood. 'It wasn't mine – it belonged to an older kid who lived down the street,' he continues. 'He would show me a few things. He was 18 or 19 and had a job, so he saved up and bought it. When I got to play that guitar, it was just incredible. He let me take it home for the weekend. It was like if you were in class and Angelina Jolie had walked in, singled you out and then brought you back on Monday and told everyone about it. That's how happy I was!'

'When I played that goldtop, it was incredible. It was like Angelina Jolie had walked in and singled you out'

So where does this particular guitar feature in his arsenal? 'I tend to go to the Deluxe for rhythm,' says Petit. 'It's got a really great presence and can get quite dirty without being mushy. It seems to have this great halfway area where it's breaking up but not abrasive.'

A sunburst Les Paul '77 reissue was also an early addition to his collection, and it reminds him of the more turbulent part of his career, leading up to his time as a busker. 'I was in a bad way. I was living in a flat and playing that '77 unamplified, but that was still loud enough to disturb the neighbour,' remembers Petit. 'What are you going to do? If you can't play an electric guitar without an amp, then you're stuffed. And there was no way in hell I could sing!' Perhaps these times with only his '77 for company is what led to its neck profile being transferred to all his new guitars.

Our prize for 'Best In Show' certainly goes to a Gibson Limited Edition Playboy guitar, complete with red silk dressing gown. 'It's a Gibson Custom Shop thing that I had heard about and decided I had to have. It's the only one in the UK – there were

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Left: Petit strums his cherished Gibson L-4CES. Right: a Two Rock Jet with handwound transformer and a Matamp cabinet

only 50 ever made. With that P90 on it and the wraparound bridge, it screams! Access to the high frets is very limited, but that can be a fun thing too.'

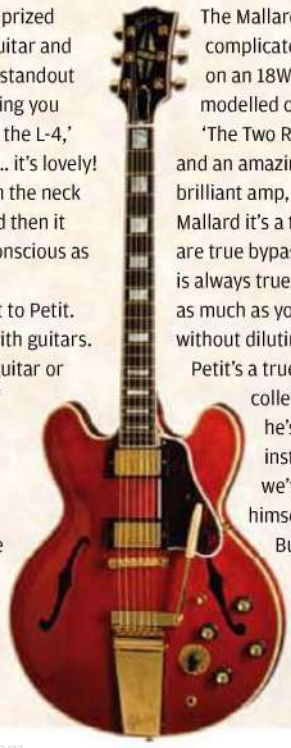
Next up on the Petit catwalk is his prized Gibson L-4CES, a truly magnificent guitar and best appreciated on *Voodoo Lover*, a standout track on the new record. 'The first thing you hear when that song fades in – that's the L-4,' says Petit. 'It has a really warm tone... it's lovely! I'm switching pickups. It starts out on the neck pickup, then I go to both pickups, and then it ends up at the bridge. That was all conscious as it's fading in to bring it to the boil.'

It's an instrument that means a lot to Petit. 'It helped redefine my relationship with guitars. You usually either have an acoustic guitar or you have one of those solid planks of wood, and it's almost as if they're different instruments. Conceptually they're both guitars, but one has a more gimmicky feel to it. Even a Les Paul is still a solid plank of wood. The L-4 has an artistry involved that's the same kind of artistry that was involved in making violins, violas and cellos. I've had people come round who've said "I want one!" who weren't even musicians... they just wanted to put it up on the wall because it's so beautiful!'

Petit has also spent many an hour experimenting with different amps, and although he used a friend's 1965 JTM45 Marshall 4x10" combo and a Gibson Explorer for the album, his live rig features some lesser-known names.

'Between *Guitararama* and *The Crave* I got my live set up far more organised. I was using a 50W Crate on *Guitararama* and it just wasn't cutting it live, so I've now got this set-up with a Mallard and a Two Rock Jet. I'm switching all combinations. The Mallard is actually split to even further complicate things; one half is modelled on an 18W Marshall, and the other half is modelled on a Vox AC-15.

'The Two Rock has a handwound transformer and an amazing, warm, full reverb. It's a truly brilliant amp, and when I marry it up to the Mallard it's a totally unique sound. Any pedals are true bypass, so my core guitar-to-amp tone is always true. The whole point was to bring as much as you get on an album to a live show without diluting anything.'



Petit's a true tone-chaser, and his expanding collection of guitars tells us that he's just as obsessive about the instrument as he is about playing it – we've just been informed that he's got himself another, a rather tasty ES-355. But has he got anywhere near his ideal sound? 'Oh, God! I'd hate to think that I'd arrived at a perfect tone,' he concludes. 'I guess I'm always learning.'

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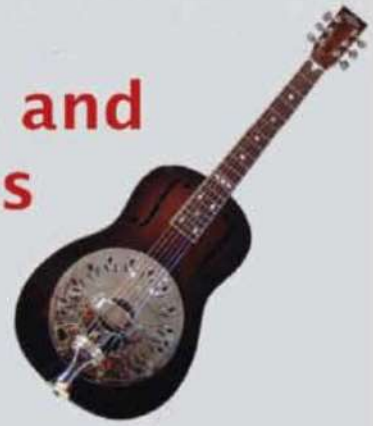

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REFINISHING YOUR GUITAR

This 1990 Japanese-made Ibanez RG550, originally metallic red, was badly damaged in a bizarre plumbing incident. What better subject for a complete transformation? Huw Price rolls up his sleeves and gets to work

After this Ibanez was water-damaged the owner chose to cover the body with sticky transfer sheets, but they crinkled up badly under the clear lacquer top coats. We decided on a complete make-over, adding a bookmatched maple veneer top with a trans black finish to restore this shredder to its former glory.

Left: the guitar as it was before we started. Right: the finished article

STAGE 1 – STRIPPING THE BODY

The guitar's owner, Roger, had already done most of the work when he used a heat gun to remove the original poly for the first refinish. We peeled off the transfer and hit the white paint with stripper, but since the plan was to add a veneer and we needed a clean gluing surface, we put the whole body through the flat sander at our local woodworking shop. On the back, we took off just enough to get rid of the paint; the top lost 1.5mm to compensate for the thickness of the veneer. This left a sharp line where the chamfer met the top surface **(Pic 2)**, a problem when it comes to folding a veneer, so we used a plane followed by a sanding block to reinstate the curve **(Pic 3)**.

STAGE 2 – PREPARING THE TOP VENEER

David Dyke (www.luthierssupplies.co.uk) came up trumps with the bookmatched veneer they sent for the body - and at 3mm thick it was about the same as an acoustic guitar top. We had to join the two pieces together. They were placed on top of each other, edges closely aligned, then clamped to a shooting board (you can make a shooting board from two pieces of MDF; see **Pic 4**). A block plane will remove wafer-thin shavings from both edges simultaneously until both are straight and true. To test the joint, place the edges together, hold them against a window pane, and look for any daylight. This is called 'candling'. Keep working with plane and shooting board until not a speck of daylight shows through.

You don't need any specialist tools to glue the veneer halves together - just a flat board, some small nails and some heavy weights. Place the pieces with joint edges together and something under each end to hold the joint a few centimetres above the board - like a shallow 'roof'. Draw along the outer edges with a pencil, remove the veneer pieces, then hammer in a nail every few centimetres along the outside pencil lines. Place the two pieces back on the board with the outside edges butted up against the nails, and apply wood glue all along one edge. Press the centre edges flat against the board, allowing the nails to push the joint together. Place a long, flat piece of wood all along the joint, and put heavy weights on top. Make sure you apply plastic packing tape to the backing board and the piece of wood supporting the weights; some glue will squeeze-out, but wood

Materials

- Body and headstock veneer
- Abrasive paper: 240 and 320 grit
- Wet and dry paper: 800, 1200 & 1500 grit
- Two cans of gloss black lacquer
- Two cans of clear gloss lacquer
- Cellulose base coat (optional)
- Masking tape
- Gaffer tape
- Wood glue
- Headstock decal

1 The clear gloss top coat made the sticky backed plastic crinkle up. Action is needed!

2 Body preparation: the thickness sander left a rather sharp line along the body chamfer

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glue won't stick to plastic (Pic 5).

On a flat-bodied guitar the 3mm-thick veneer would have been fine, but it's too thick to bend around the body chamfer, so it was back to the woodworking shop to sand it down to 1.2mm.

STAGE 3 – VENEERING THE TOP

Obviously our join had to run up the centre line of the guitar, but we have options regarding which areas of grain to use. You can cut the body shape out of a piece of paper and place it over the veneer to help visualise the end result, then draw around the cutout to mark the shape of the body (Pic 6). Now cut out the body shape with a craft knife, leaving 5mm around the edge for safety. This allows you to get your clamps close to the edge of the body, and cuts down on trimming later.

When gluing veneers it's important to spread the pressure across the entire surface, so I cut two clamping cauls out of scrap plywood, just a bit larger than the body. This makes clamping much easier and protects the body from the clamps. For the top chamfer, we cut the veneer diagonally across the starting point of the chamfer curve then held it down with gaffer tape (masking tape isn't grippy enough for the job). Using gaffer tape is a bit risky, but luckily no grain was lifted (Pic 7).

For gluing the veneer, we decided not to use Titebond, which hasn't always been too successful for us on this kind of job in the past, but Humbrol Cascamite - actually urea formaldehyde glue, just like the stuff Gibson used to attach maple tops on Les Paul bodies in the '50s. This comes in powder form which is mixed with water, and unlike Titebond, it doesn't go off too quickly.

STAGE 4 – TRIMMING THE VENEER

A pro luthier might use a router to trim the edges of the veneer, but in our workshop articles we like to use non-specialist tools. It'll take you a while to carefully trim the body edges and the pickup and bridge routs using a craft knife, but it's quite possible. Make sure you've got plenty of fresh blades, and watch those fingers! Next, use a sanding block to true up the sides and round over the edges of the body and the routs.

To reinstate the holes for the knobs and switch, place the body face-down on a piece of plywood and drill through the centre of each hole with your thinnest drill bit. Use the original holes in the control cavity to guide you, then flip the body over and use these pilot holes for larger bradawl bits. I was able to drill the switch screw holes to size straight off, but had to use a reamer to widen the holes for the pot shafts to the correct diameter. For the switch slot I drilled undersized holes all the way along its length then cut out the wood between the holes with a craft knife, then used a small file to true up the edges of the slot (Pic 8).

The Tools You'll Need

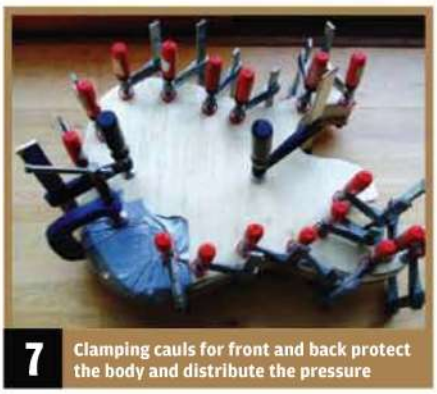
10 to 15 G clamps
A craft knife with lots of fresh blades
Sanding block
Paint scraper
Reamer
Drill

3 The chamfer edge was smoothed over to allow the veneer to bend over it nicely

4 Shooting board: two lengths of MDF stuck on top of another to create a 'step'

5 The veneer halves are glued on a clamping board. Note nails on the outside edges

6 Using a paper template helped us decide which section of the veneer to use



7 Clamping cauls for front and back protect the body and distribute the pressure

8 The edges and riuts were trimmed flush using a craft knife and sanding blocks

9 Sanding the finish off the front of the head. The black areas reveal the low spots

10 The work has paid off, and our Ibanez's headstock is now ready for veneering

STAGE 5 – VENEERING THE HEADSTOCK

A matching maple headstock veneer would give this guitar a real touch of class; sadly the old refinish had left the front surface uneven and rounded towards the edges. Rather than use paint stripper, we began to sand off the gloss black using a flat sanding block. As the wood started to show it was easy to see the low spots (Pic 9), so the sanding was continued until the black had almost disappeared. This reduced the depth of the ledge that the locking nut sits on, but that depth will return when the veneer is applied (Pic 10).

David Dyke provided a lovely piece of maple veneer and once again we placed a cutout template over it to find the area of grain that worked best for the shape. Again, it's best to draw the outline onto the veneer and cut out the shape leaving 5mm extra all around the edge.

Next we made two clamping cauls, roughly the same shape as the headstock, from a scrap piece of plywood. Our headstock wasn't quite flat, so I stuck a piece of cork tile to the underside of the top caul using double-sided carpet tape, hoping that this slightly softer material combined with clamping pressure would conform to any curves.

With Cascamite glue applied, the cauls were positioned and the G clamps tightened (Pic 11). The headstock was left overnight, and when the clamps came off the result was just about perfect. The next task was to carefully true up the edges

using a craft knife and a sanding block, then re-establish the locking nut ledge using a mini sanding block made from a wood offcut (Pic 12).

Remember the paper template we made for the headstock? Before I applied the veneer I used the cutout section to record the position of the trussrod rout and the screw holes for the trussrod cover and string tree. Guided by the template marks I drilled through the veneer to reinstate the holes, then carved away the maple covering the trussrod rout. From the rear I drilled pilot holes through the centre of each tuner hole, enlarged the holes in the veneer with a wider bradawl bit, then used a reamer to increase them to the right size. After flat sanding with 240 grit paper, the head and body were ready for finishing (Pic 13).

STAGE 6 – THE TRANS BLACK FINISH

Because of our cool-looking veneer, we thought a PRS 'stonewash' finish would be ideal. On the amazing figured maple tops you see on guitars by PRS and Suhr and so forth, the maple is dyed before the finish is applied. This makes the grain 'pop out' regardless of the viewing angle.

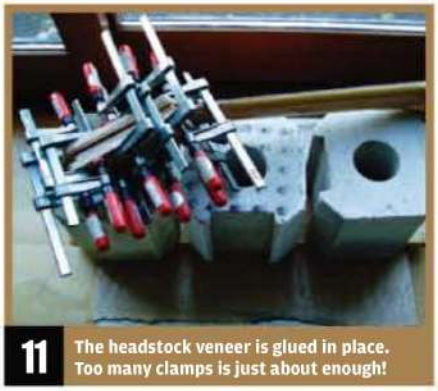
For our water-based black stain we settled on a 3:1 ratio of dye to water. First, raise the grain of the veneer by wiping it over with a damp cloth; when it's dry, wipe on the dye. At first our guitar looked dark purple, but after sanding off most of the dye it got a lot better. If you repeat the dying, sanding and wiping process, it accentuates the contrast in the grain (Pics 14 to 19).

STAGE 7 – SPRAYING

Steve Robinson (www.manchesterguitartech.co.uk) supplied two cans of black gloss and two of clear gloss nitrocellulose. The maple top was first protected with a few coats of clear gloss. Once dry, I masked off the front of the body and sprayed satin black into the bridge and pickup routs. Next I brushed high-density cellulose base coat from Fiddes (www.fiddes.co.uk) onto the back and sides and sanded everything smooth. The mask for the front was only secured loosely; firmly fixed masking tape leaves sharp edges in the lacquer when it's peeled off, so I left the edges loose and placed the body face down on two risers to spray the back and sides black.

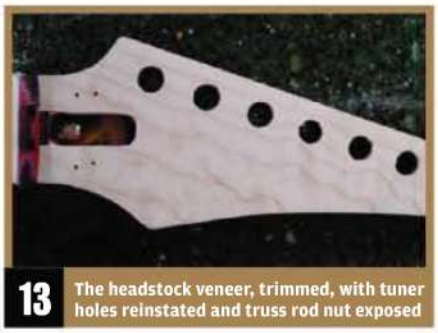
We decided on a thin black burst around the edges to 'blend' in the veneer top. After removing the front mask and laying the body on its back, we carefully sprayed the burst, holding the spray can over the centre of the body and directing the spray outwards. Start by spraying beyond the edge then gradually bring it towards the body until you see the edges of the body picking up the colour. Be patient and build up the burst slowly. If you end up with splutters or overspray, you can sand off the excess because there are clear coats underneath.

Next I covered the whole guitar with several coats of clear gloss and set the guitar aside for a week. The finish was then cut back using 800, 1200 and 1500 grit wet and dry abrasive paper in the usual way. After buffing to a deep gloss with Farecla G3 and 3M Machine Polish and sticking an Ibanez logo from eBay on the headstock, the guitar was ready for reassembly.



11 The headstock veneer is glued in place. Too many clamps is just about enough!

12 Here's the headstock veneer glued in place and dry and ready for edge trimming



13 The headstock veneer, trimmed, with tuner holes reinstated and truss rod nut exposed

14 Our body after the first application of stain. At this stage it looks a bit purple

15 Here's the body with the first coat of stain sanded back. Not too handsome, you say?

16 When the veneer is wiped down with white spirit, it really starts to look exciting

17 Back to the staining. We're adding a second application to get the colour to go darker

18 Stain sanded back again. More stages give more grain contrast but less 'movement'

VERDICT

If you fancy doing a project like this, remember that you don't have to use black dye - the procedure would be the same if you wanted your guitar to be trans blue, trans red or trans-anything. It involved quite a lot of work, but we're delighted with the results. I've never done a job like this before, but if I can do it then you can too. Ibanez RGs must be amongst the most undervalued guitars on the secondhand market; you could score one like this for less than £300, and with some time and around £100 in materials you could end up with a superb maple-topped guitar. What are you waiting for?

19 A second wipe down with white spirit gives an idea of how the guitar might look

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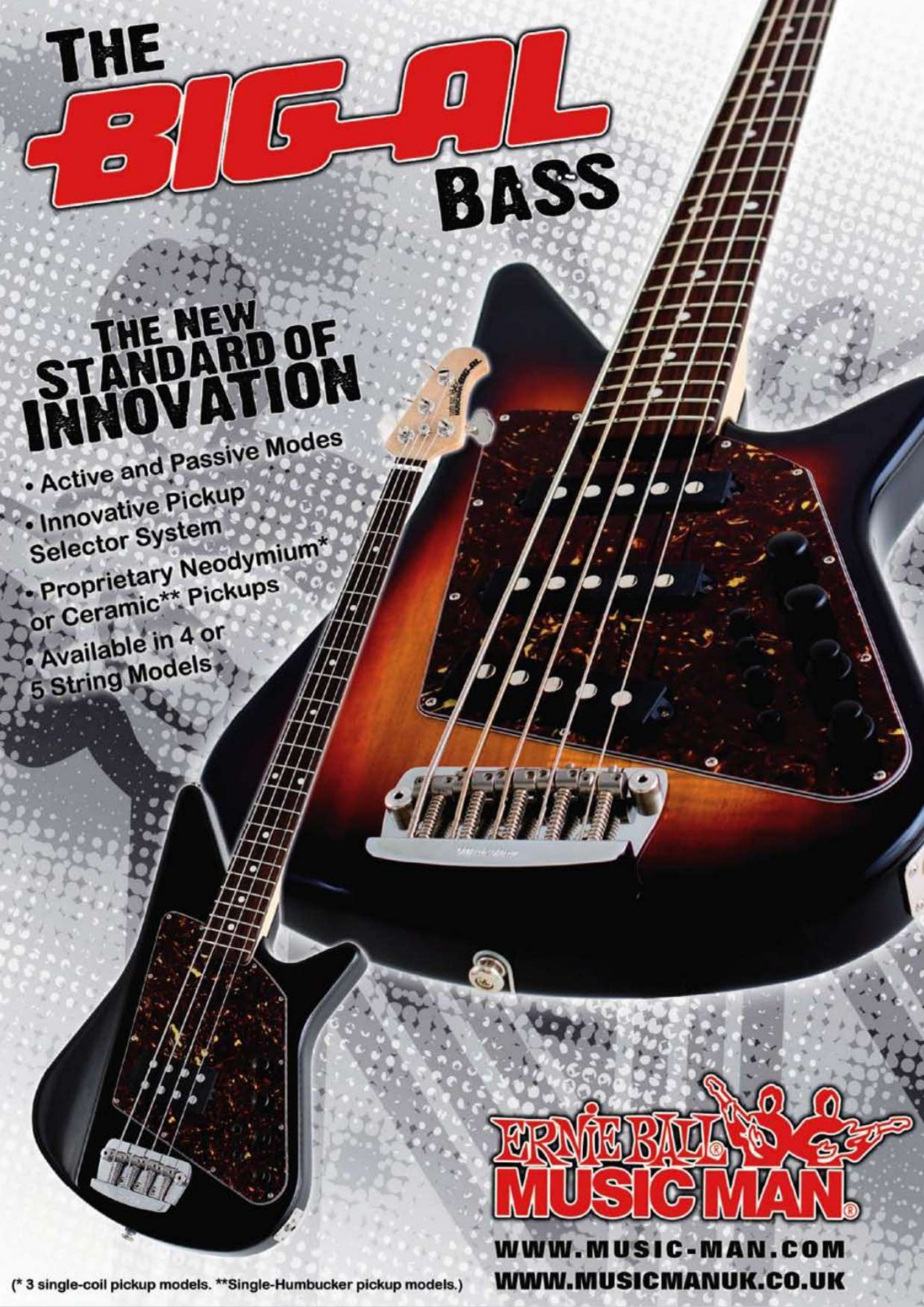
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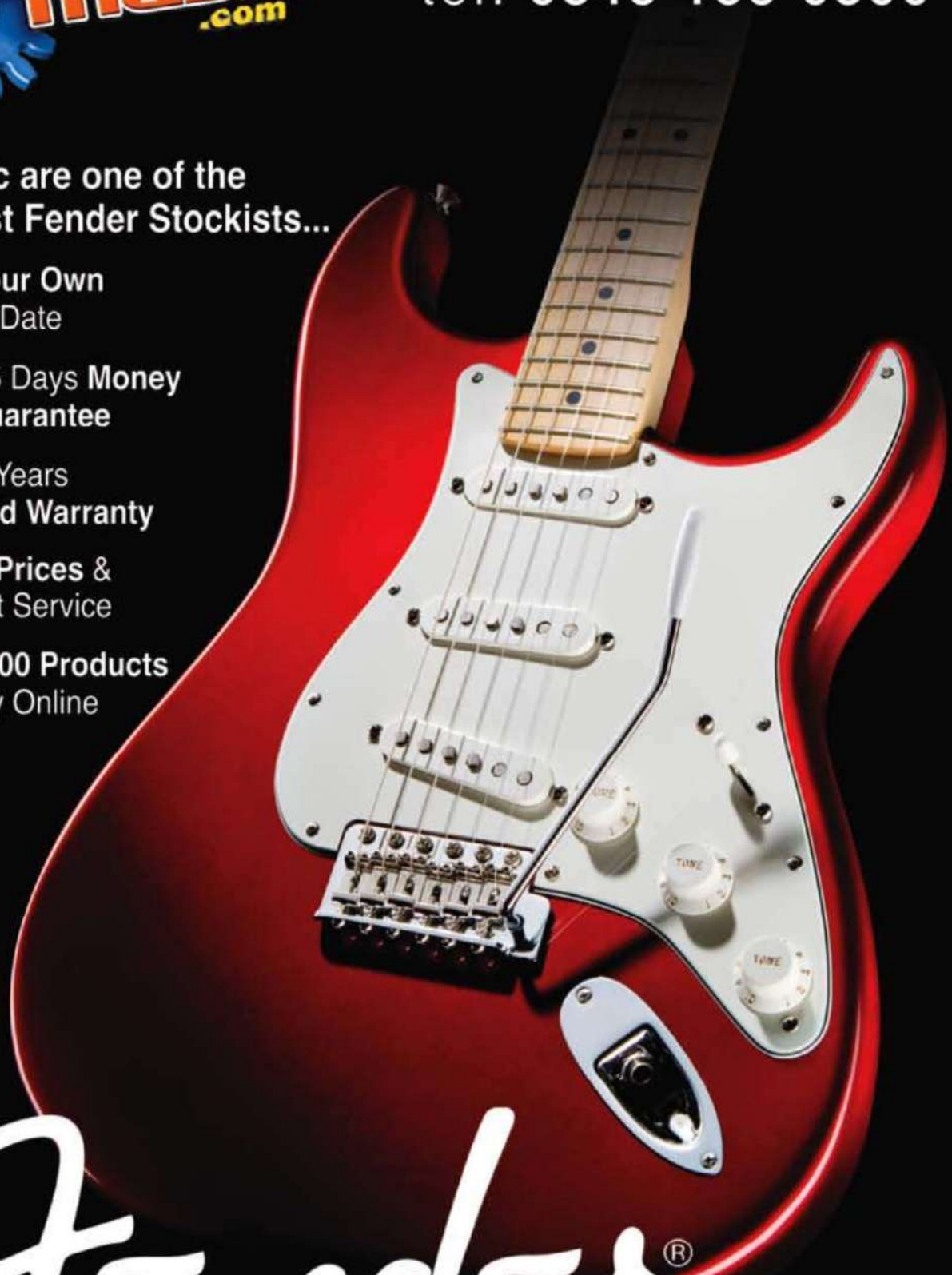

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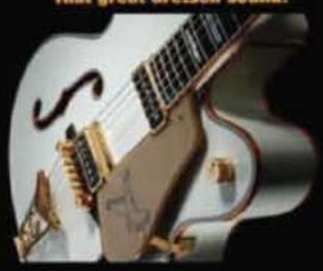

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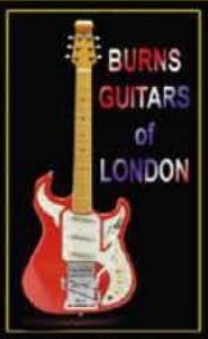

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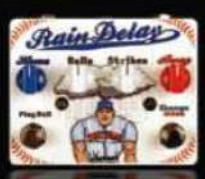

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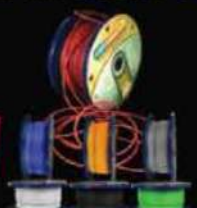

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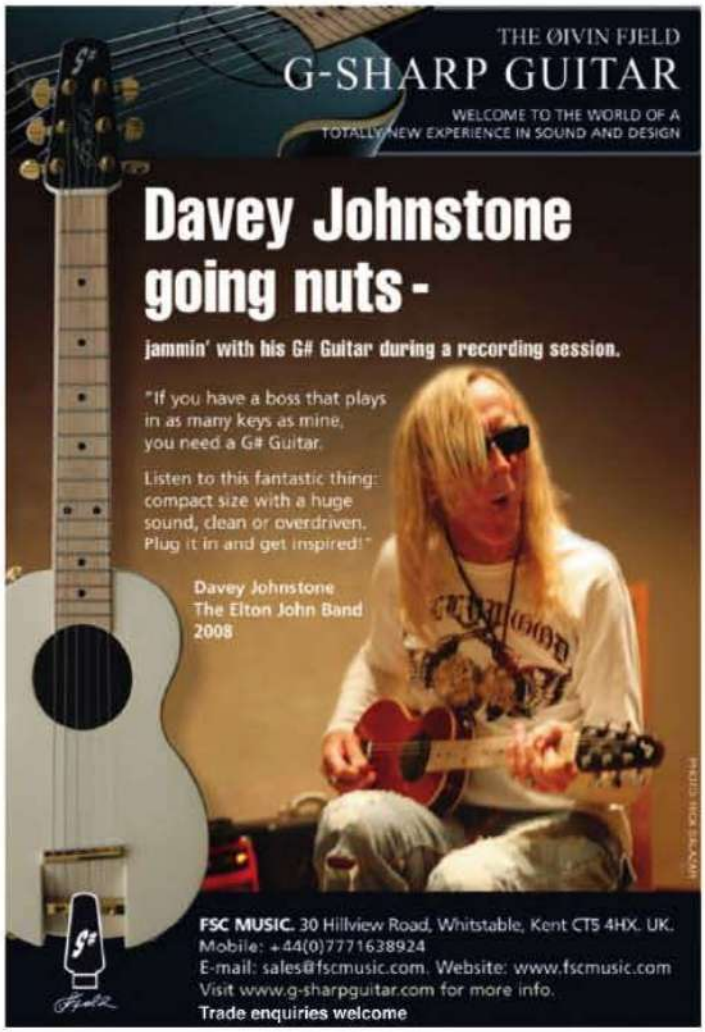

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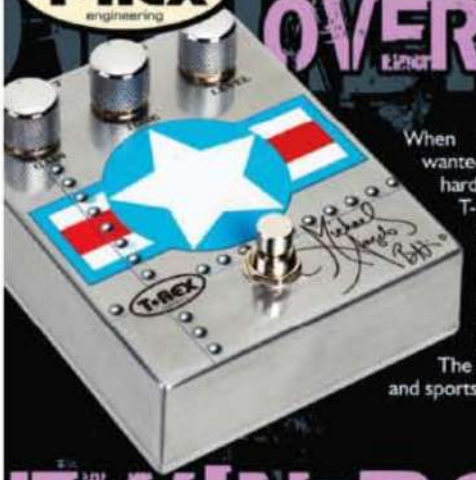

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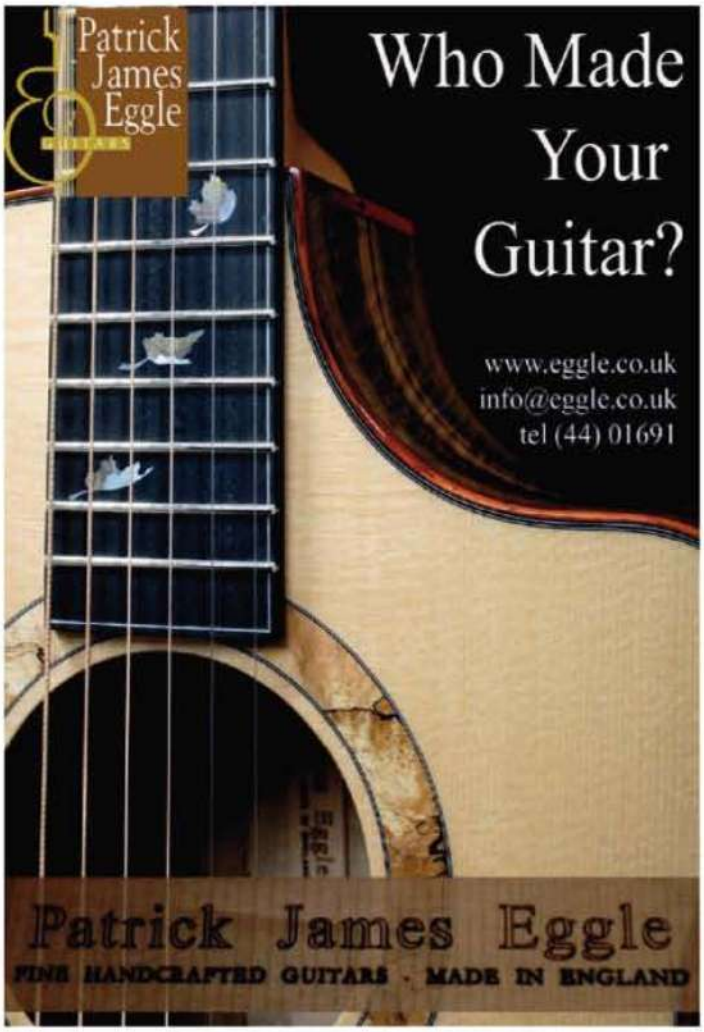

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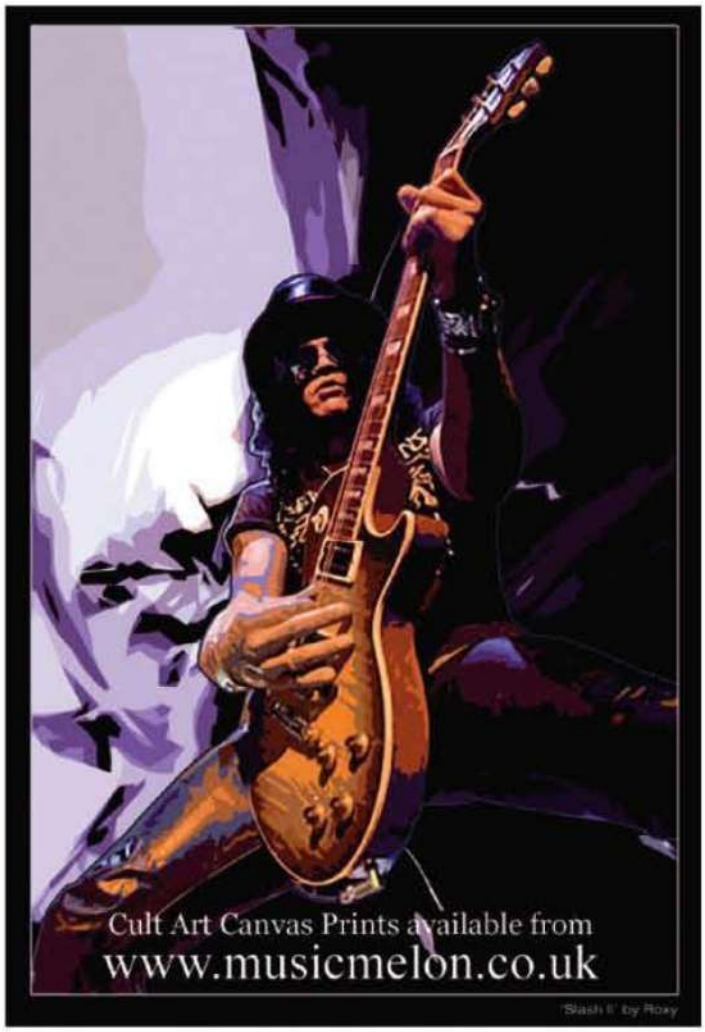

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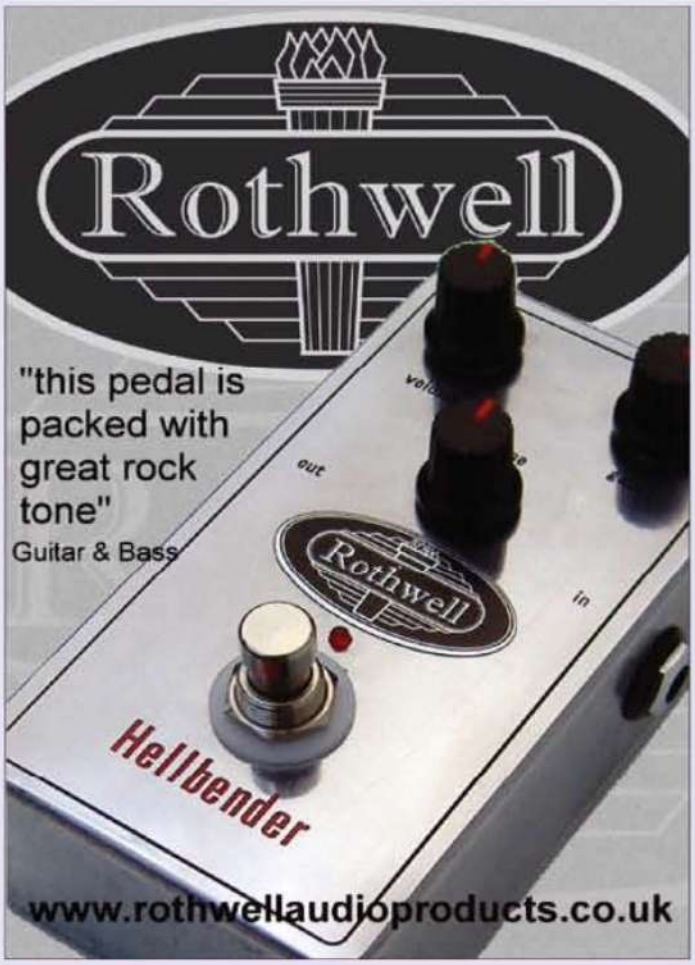

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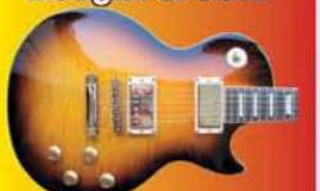
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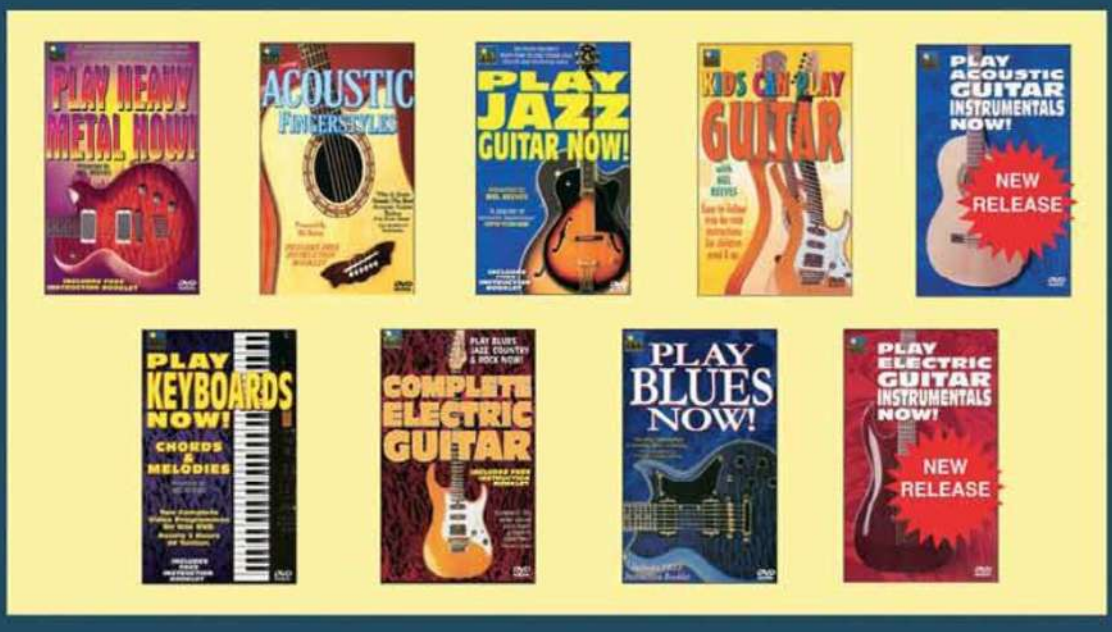

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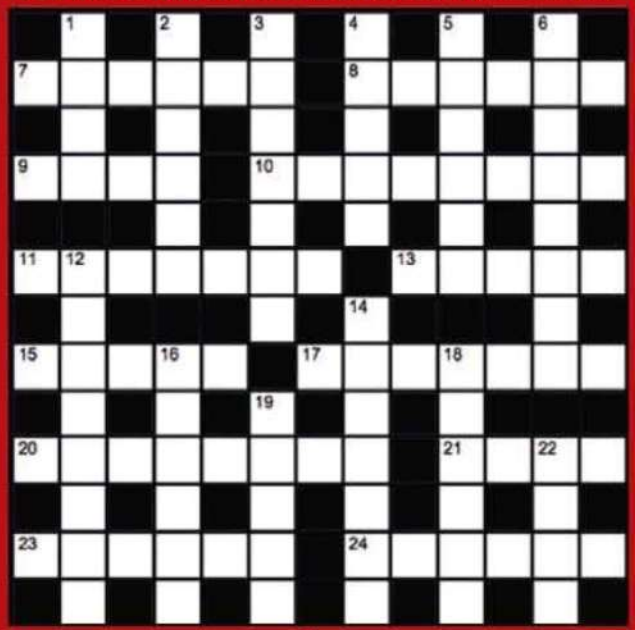

ACROSS

7. Drum needed for tea (6)
8. Mr Play In A Day (6)
9. Bassist Michael Balzary (4)
10. See 11 (4,4)
11. 11 & 10 Arrange whackiest one tap Copicat (7)
13. Royal navy musical genre (5)
15. Friend of Guy and Holly (5)
17. Beatles album available for cash (3,4)
20. Skynyrd song needed as a Beatle song (8)
21. Trooped without rod to first string (3,1)
23. Use mum to display old pieces (6)
24. Fruity amplification? (6)

DOWN

1. Eric ___ (Thin Lizzy) (4)
2. We hear a nail at leading edge of sound envelope (6)
3. Location of configuration (7)
4. Steal string cleaning cloth (5)
5. Cancel regarding noise from 1 down's (6)
6. Van Halen's David Lee takes well to manufacturer of pedals and audio products (8)
12. Sign from Hair musical (8)
14. Told GPO about original Les Paul (7)
16. Swiss amps use fuel oil we here (6)
18. Savant makes expert route finder (3,3)
19. ___ Page (5)
22. Tuners in top egs (4)

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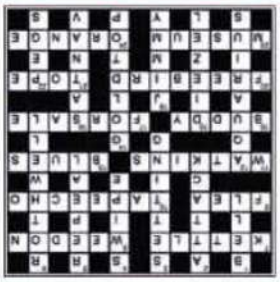

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PLAY LIKE

Channelling everything from Robert Johnson to Led Zep, the White Stripes guitarist has emerged as the prime mover of neo-blues rock. Douglas Noble tracks his methods

Jack White

Guitar Techniques

Jack White of the White Stripes and the Raconteurs is not a man to make things easy for himself. A big fan of blues, he nevertheless has little truck for a 12-bar shuffle in E and the pentatonic minor scale. 'I want more of a challenge,' he says. 'I want to play non-typical blues within the rules of blues and its codes. I'm hugely influenced by blues as for me blues is synonymous with truth, and a lot of my heroes are bluesmen. I don't want to copy or imitate them, but I can sympathise with their attitude.'

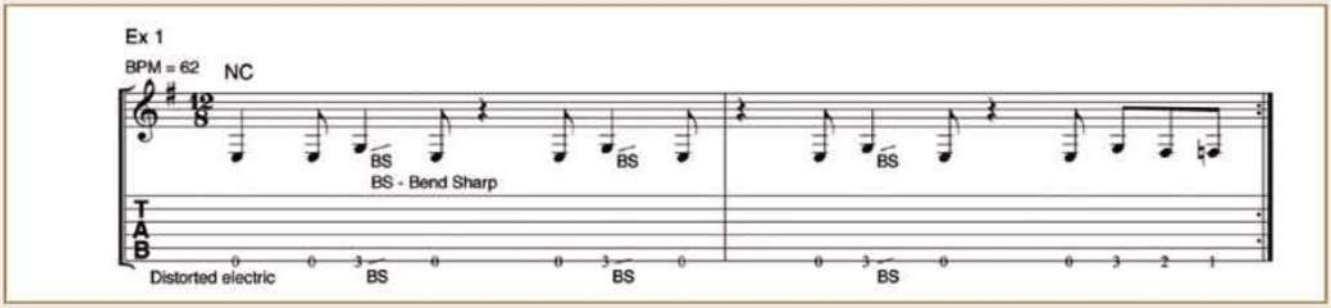
As if that wasn't enough of a challenge, White also likes guitars that are difficult to play. 'I think it's cheating to buy brand new guitars,' he opines. 'They don't go out of tune, and it's too easy. I love playing difficult guitars, ones that have so many problems, because I like to punish myself. Those guitars have more character and more soul.'

Jack White started out as a largely unschooled guitarist, his technique gradually evolving by chance. 'In my teens, when I first started, I didn't use plectrums at all and played with fingers all the time,' he remembers. 'I think it was an accident that I started to play with both plectrum and fingers, but now I switch from plectrum to fingers in the middle of songs. I play with my thumb, index finger and ring finger, while holding the plectrum with my middle finger.'

In the summit of Guitar Greats DVD *It Might Get Loud* with Jimmy Page and the Edge, White expounded on his traditional methods. 'Technology is a big destroyer of emotion and truth... it doesn't do anything for creativity... it doesn't make you a more creative person. It's the disease you have to fight in any creative field - ease of use.' Ironically, the White Stripes' *Blue Orchid* was inspired by a piece of technology - an Electro-Harmonix POG. White claims *Blue Orchid* was the first song to be recording using this device, which adds a blend of upper and lower octaves. 'That was the first riff I got when I tried it. The whole thing just came out automatically.'

Ex 1: Aluminium-style blues riff

12/8 Time



Aluminium is based on a couple of classic blues riff traits - the movement from the root to the minor third, with the minor third treated with a quarter tone bend (indicated by BS, or Bend Sharp), and a lilting 12/8 feel. These traits are illustrated in the first bar and a half of the exercise. As with the original *Aluminium* riff, it's rounded off with a three-note descending chromatic run on the last beat of the second bar which leads back into the riff. What's not quite so 'classic blues' is White's overdriven tone - indeed, when White stops playing, you can clearly hear feedback squalls. Oh, yeah.

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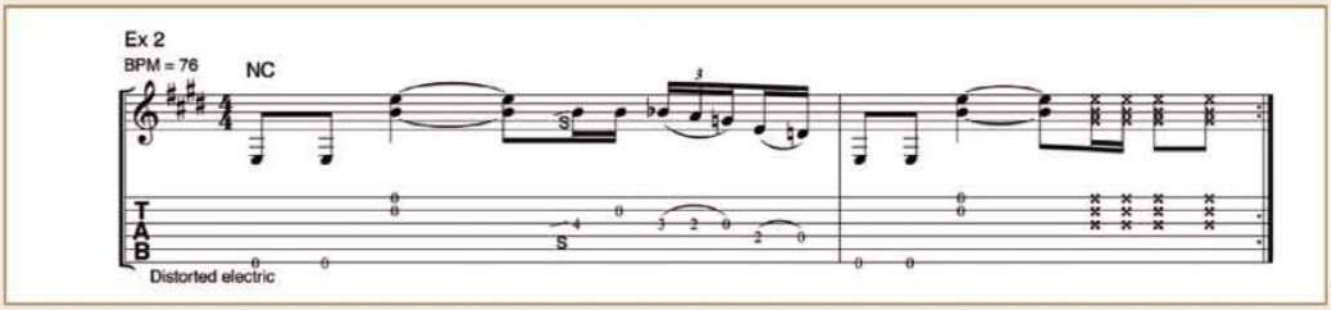
Ex 2: Ball And Biscuit-style blues licks

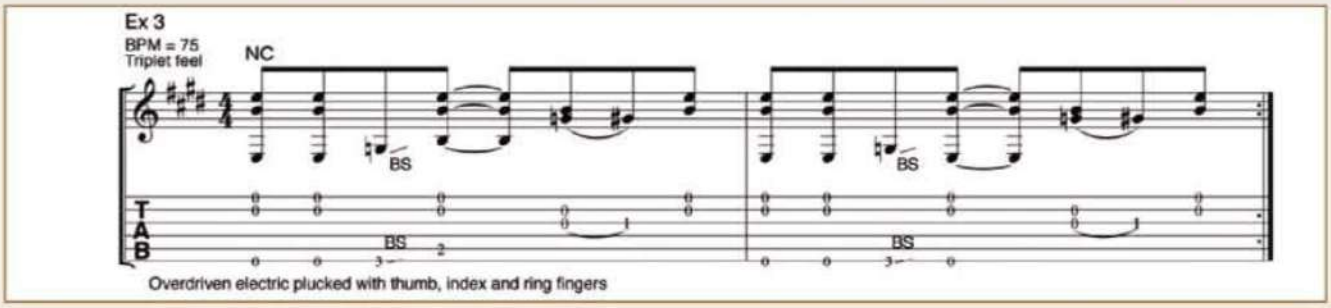
4/4 Time



Ball And Biscuit is found on the White Stripes' fourth LP, *Elephant*, and it uses some traditional-style blues licks, played with a rather less traditional overdriven tone and percussive deadened strings. Our exercise illustrates these techniques. Both begin with the bottom open string and the top two strings played open. Then, bar one shows a stock blues lick, similar to the one at 0:22 of *Ball And Biscuit*. The second half of bar two makes rhythmic use of deadened strings; White uses this technique liberally throughout the song. This exercise can be played with plectrum or thumb and fingers, or a combination of plectrum and fingers. Take a close look at Exercise 3 for a specific look at White's fingerpicking technique.

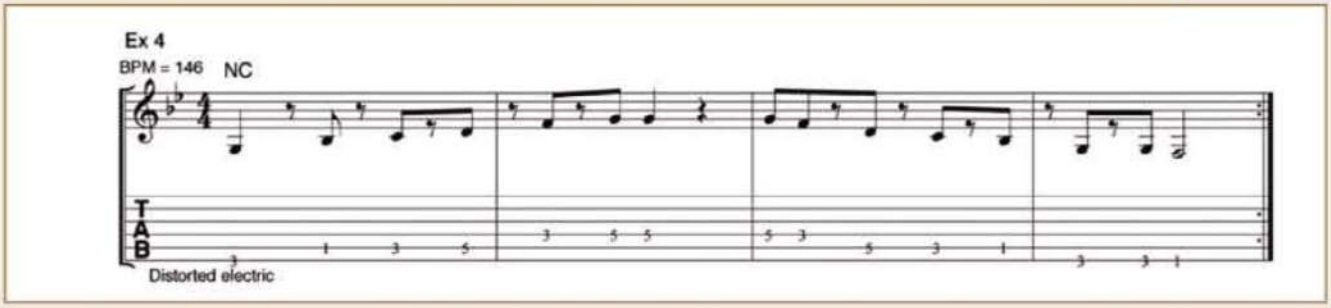
Ex 3: Thumb and fingers

4/4 Time

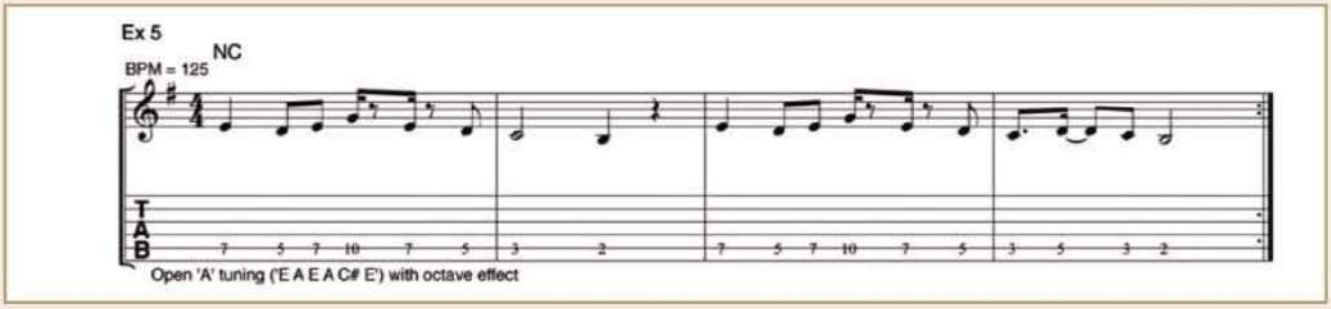


Here's a lick to illustrate White's fingerpicking technique. He'll keep hold of the plectrum in his plucking hand by holding it with his middle finger, then uses the thumb to pluck the lower strings and the index and ring fingers to pluck the upper strings. The top two open strings struck at the start of this exercise can either be stopped by putting the fingers back onto the strings, or allowed to ring on; try both ways to create different effects.

Ex 4: Syncopation

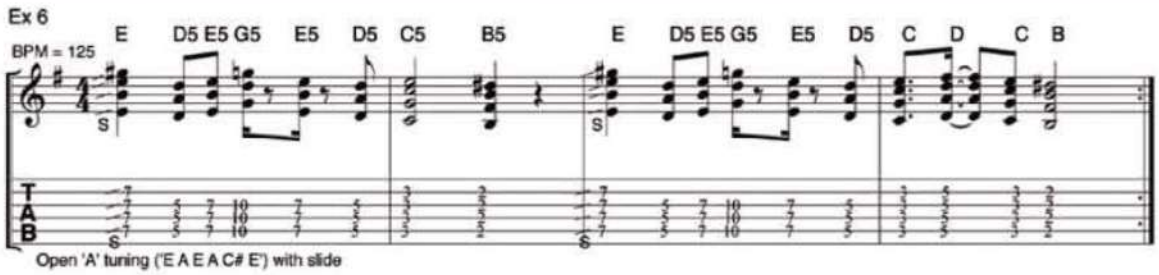
4/4 Time

Jack White often uses syncopation in his riffs, creating far more rhythmic interest than normal straight playing. This exercise shows a G pentatonic minor scale (G Bb C D F G), ascending then descending. Note that the majority of the notes are played on the upbeat – that is, on the 'and' in between the beats. So, if you were counting the first bar, you would count 'one, two and three and four and' with the notes being struck on 'one' then on each of the 'ands'. The syncopation is 'resolved' on the last notes of bars two and four due to the fact that these notes are on the beat.

Ex 5: Seven Nation Army-style riff

4/4 Time

This exercise shows a riff similar to the one in *Seven Nation Army*. Although *Seven Nation Army* is in open A tuning (E A E A C# E), this riff uses the fifth string only, so it can be played on the fifth string of a guitar in standard tuning. At the start of *Seven Nation Army* White uses a Digitech Whammy Pedal to put the guitar down an octave, emulating a bass (he uses a similar effect at the start of *The Hardest Button To Button*). The *Seven Nation Army* riff was influenced by the main theme of Bruckner's Fifth Symphony. Live, White fingers the single notes on the fifth string all with the first finger.

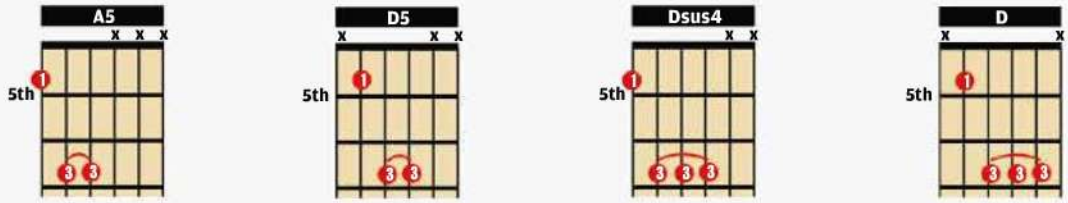
Ex 6: Slide

4/4 Time



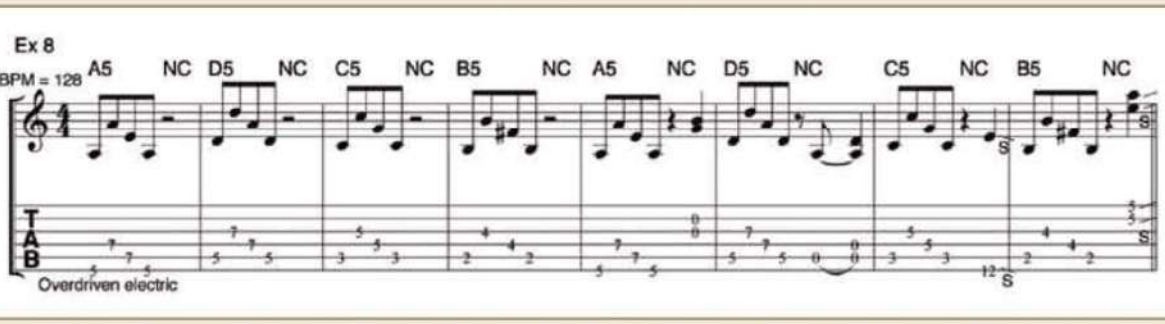
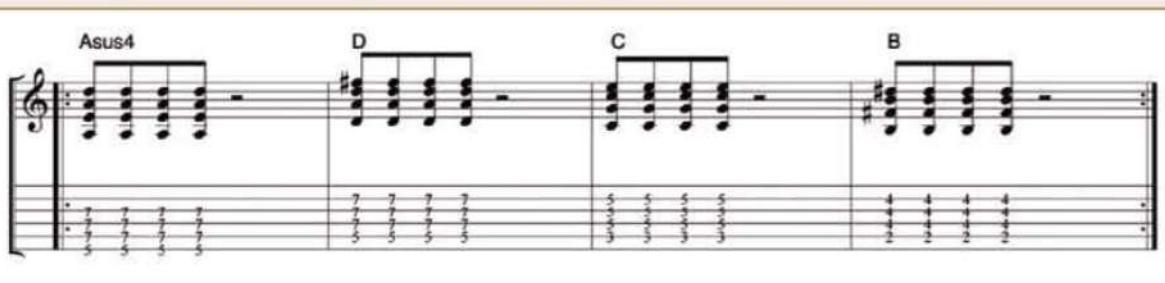
White's response to the question 'What's the greatest-ever invention for guitarists?' is simple: 'The slide!' He plays a variation on the single note *Seven Nation Army* riff, illustrated in Exercise 1 . As shown here, it's essentially the same thing but played with the slide barring three or four note chords. Since we're in open A (E A E A C# E) this produces either a three-note power chord or a four-note major chord. Since all the chords are created with barrés with the slide, you can probably manage without chord diagrams! There's a slide indicated into the E chord at the start of bars 1 and 3; try sliding from two frets lower into the chord. Feel free to add other moves into chords... White, after all, rarely plays a song the same way twice.

Ex 7: A5, D5, Asus4 and Dsus4 chords



The two 5 chords here consist of the root, fifth and octave – notice it's the same shape for both chords, but on the bottom three strings for A5 and strings five, four and three for D5. Asus4 is formed by extending the barre of the third finger, adding the fourth at the top of the chord. When this shape is moved a string higher it produces a D chord, since the note at the top of the chord is the major third of the scale due to the way in which the guitar is tuned. All four chords here are fingered with the third finger on the upper strings; White sometimes uses the fourth finger for these types of shapes.

Ex 8: Chordal riff and arpeggios

4/4 Time



White often plays the notes of the root/fifth/octave power chord from Exercise 7 as arpeggios. These 'power chord arpeggios' can be heard in *I Want To Be The Boy To Warm Your Mother's Heart* and *The Union Forever*, but most noticeably at the start of *The Hardest Button To Button*. The first four bars use the shapes from Exercise 7; the C5 and B5 shapes are D5 moved down the fretboard. This produces a four chord arpeggiated riff similar to the start of *The Hardest Button To Button*. Then, over the next four bars, we explore a technique used by White in live versions of *...Button*, and other songs: instead of sticking to the sparse studio original, he fills in the gaps between the arpeggios with open strings or slides, or perhaps percussively struck deadened strings. He very consciously avoids accepted 'hot licks' since that is totally out of keeping with his style and ethos, and always manages to sound interesting and musical. White started on the drums in his early years, which perhaps explains the sense of rhythmic awareness and propulsion in much of his playing. Then, the second line is four note chords, again taken from Exercise 7, and similar to the chorus of *The Hardest Button To Button*.

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Pawnshop Rejects: A Jack White Gearfile

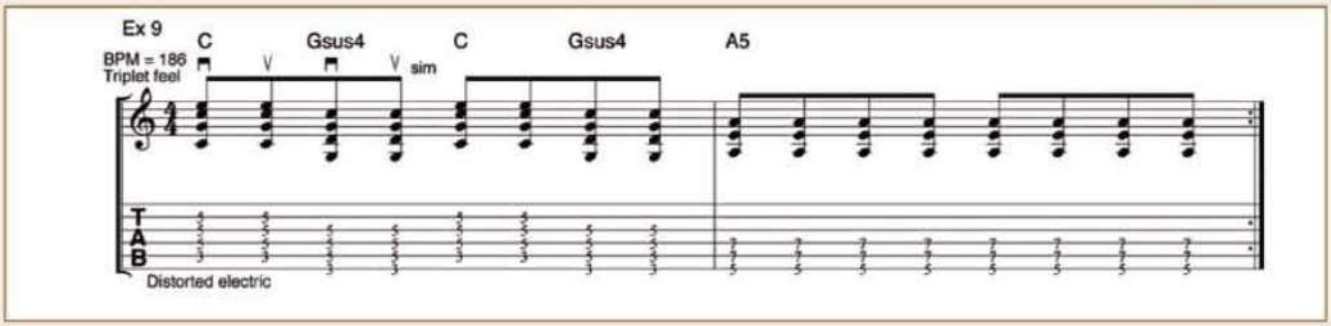
With the White Stripes White plays a highly distinctive 1964 Airline, built by Valco of Chicago and sometimes nicknamed the 'JB Hutto' after a famous blues user or else the 'Jetson' model after its futuristic design. 'You could buy them in the '60s in a department store called Montgomery Wards, but they stopped selling them in the '70s,' White explains. The Airline is made of a type of fibreglass called Res-O-Glas, with two humbucker-sized single coils. He always uses his Airline in standard tuning.

White also uses a hollow-bodied Kay in open A (E A E C# A E, from bottom to top) and an unbranded Japanese '60s guitar in open E tuning (E B E G# B E, bottom to top). The open A-tuned Kay can be heard in *Seven Nation Army* and *I Want To Be The Boy To Warm Your Mother's Heart*. With the Raconteurs, he uses different guitars including a custom-built take on a Gretsch Duo-Jet, with three single coils.

For effects, White mostly uses a Digitech Whammy pedal and a Big Muff Pi. 'In my small pedal chain it's the Whammy first, then the Big Muff. What I like about the Whammy pedal is that it can raise my guitar an octave, and what I like about the Big Muff is that it's just distortion. I have them in that order because it's not a high-pitched distortion, but a high pitch *with* distortion.' He's also a fan of the Electro-Harmonix POG Polyphonic Octave Generator. Amps include two 100W Silvertones and a Fender Twin Reverb, with smaller Silvertones, a Selmer and a Gretsch employed for recording.

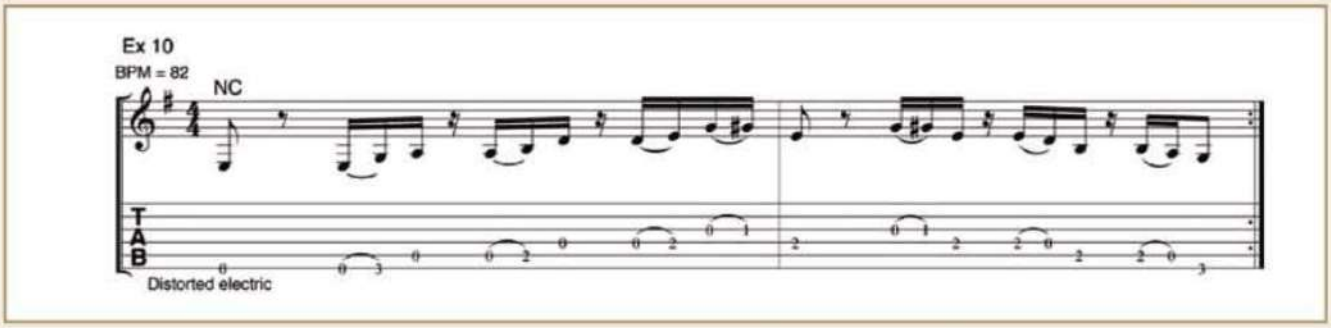
Ex 9: Black Math-style riff

4/4 Time



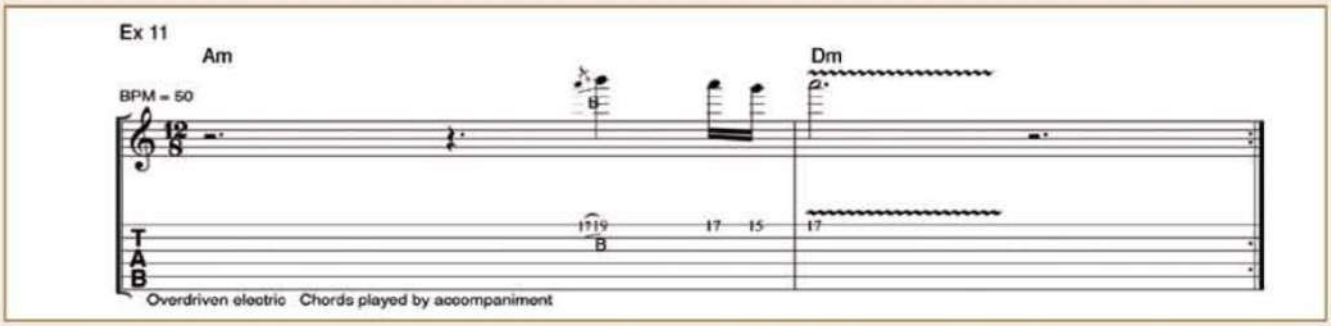
This exercise shows a riff similar to the one at the start of *Black Math*. Again, we're using the shapes from Exercise 3. It's played with a triplet or shuffle feel and at a brisk tempo of 186. Note the pick directions; it's played with down- and up-strumming in order to get the fluency and smoothness. The chord shape in the first bar is the same, just moved from strings five to two to the bottom four strings. Don't worry about sounding all the notes – White often plays the second hit of each chord as deadened strings as he lifts the fingers in preparation for moving to the next one.

Ex 10: 'Salute Your Solution' bridge

4/4 Time

In the bridge of the Raconteurs' *Salute Your Solution* at 1:44 White plays an ascending then descending riff similar to this, based on the E pentatonic minor scale (E G A B D E), with the addition of the stock blues and jazz hammer-on from the minor third note of the scale, G, to the major third note of the key, G#. White makes good use of rests between the component parts of the riff in order to give definition and momentum to the part.

Ex 11: Vibrato

4/4 Time



White stretches out with an uncharacteristically long solo in the live version of *Blue Veins* with the Raconteurs. He peppers his solo with a distinctive vibrato, such as can be heard at 3:48 in the performance at http://tinyurl.com/5egakf. In the key of A minor, this vibrato is executed on the key note on the top string, 17th fret, at the end of a lick like the one above. Listen closely to the phrase, then try to imitate White's speed and depth of vibrato.

PLAY LIKE

Photo: Angela Lubrano/LivePix

Mark Bedford

Though no technical wizard, Mark Bedford of Madness can really play – and he always has the happy knack of making listeners sit up and take notice of the bass. Gareth Morgan takes one step beyond

Bass Techniques

In 1979, with punk slipping from the forefront of our musical consciousness, a new movement based around the 2 Tone record label was about to gain ascendancy. 2 Tone promoted the revival of ska, a style that originated in Jamaica in the late '50s with artists like Prince Buster. It's a style usually characterised by a guitar chop on beats two and four. The UK revival fused ska rhythms and melodies with punk rock's aggression and social commentary and was largely focused in and around Coventry, with notable bands including the Selecter, the Specials and the Beat.

Madness were also part of the movement, although they came from Camden and were only on the 2 Tone label for one single release. In their original form, they lasted the longest and also had the most chart success. Their bass player was – and still is – Mark 'Bedders' Bedford.

Bedford was born in Islington in 1961 and attended William Ellis School in Kentish Town. He met future members of Madness when, as the Invaders, they played a gig there in 1976. He joined the Invaders in 1978, and by 1979 the band had settled on the name Madness as homage to one of their favourite Prince Buster songs.

After their first single *The Prince* was a surprise hit, Madness jumped ship to Stiff Records and recorded five albums from 1979-1984. Soon, a poppier approach led to numerous hit singles including *Our House* and *Baggy Trousers*. In 1986, after one album on their own Zarjazz label, they split up due to the dreaded 'musical differences'. Six years later they commenced a series of reunions that culminated in 2009's much-acclaimed album *The Liberty of Norton Folgate*. They're currently working on a new album.

Bedford is a career-long Fender Precision player and in the studio uses an old Ampeg B15 amp. His sound is bright and clanky, with a punk approach that heads in the direction of the Stranglers' JJ Burnel, although Bedford generally plays fingerstyle. He always delivers solid grooves with just the right amount of melodic content. His choice of notes can sometimes be joyfully left field – and for this alone, we love him to bits.

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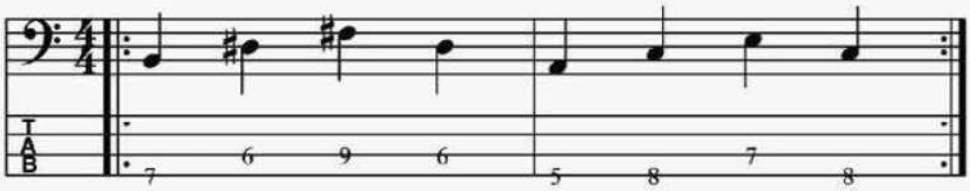
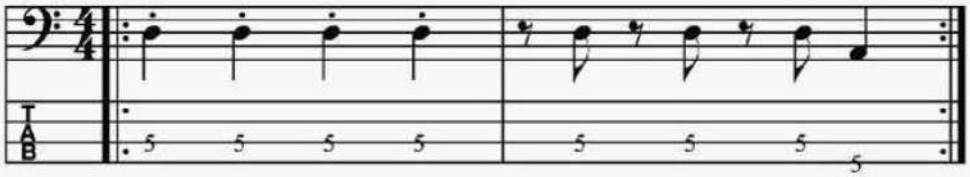
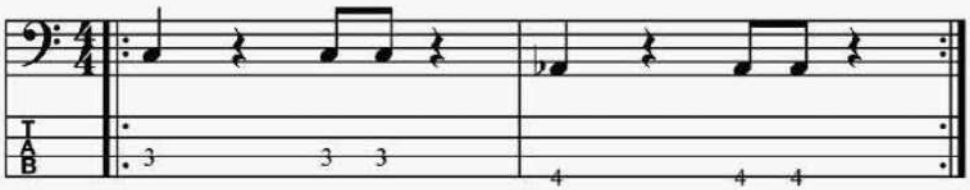
Ex 1: Half past monsoon

4/4 Time

As well as the ever-present rhythm guitar chank on beats two and four, ska music is also characterised by a quarter-note walking bass line. The note choices are very similar to old school blues and R'n'B – in other words the bread and butter of roots, thirds and fifths which, with a chord of B major, equals B, D#, F#. Bedford's bass parts on the straight ska numbers such as *One Step Beyond* and *Night Boat To Cairo* adhere to this rule, and we've based this first example on the latter. By the way, all of our examples can be found on the excellent compilation, *Complete Madness*.

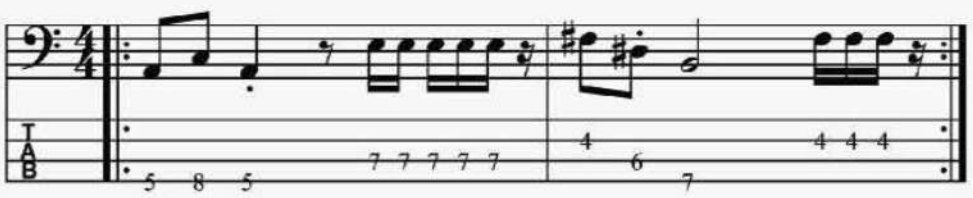
Ex 2: A disgrace to the human race

4/4 Time

One of Madness' real strengths was the fact that virtually every member of the band contributed to the repertoire. It also meant that a broad spectrum of subject matter was covered, and songs which were written from a remarkable variety of standpoints. For example, the outwardly chirpy *Embarrassment* was written by keyboardist Mike Barson to chronicle the turmoil felt by his family when they were greeted by the news of his teenage sister becoming pregnant with a mixed race child. The bass part is a neat mix of punchy on-beats and off-beats with a real old-school soul feel to it.

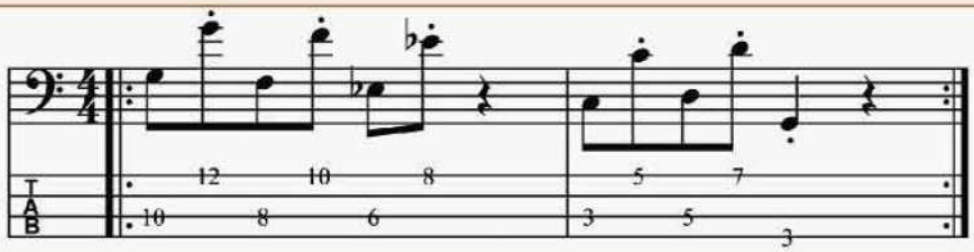
Ex 3: My bass is mad at me

4/4 Time

Just like any other consummate pop bass player (and, be under no illusions, he definitely falls into this category), Bedford uses space in many of his bass parts, whether by neatly and accurately clipping note lengths or simply by... well, just not playing anything. Check out our third example: it's a version of the ultra-simple verse part from *My Girl*, another big hit single for the band in 1979. There's nothing technically difficult about this section, but it's a touch of genius in the context of the song. Think this kind of simplicity is easy? Just see if you can resist the temptation to play a fill.

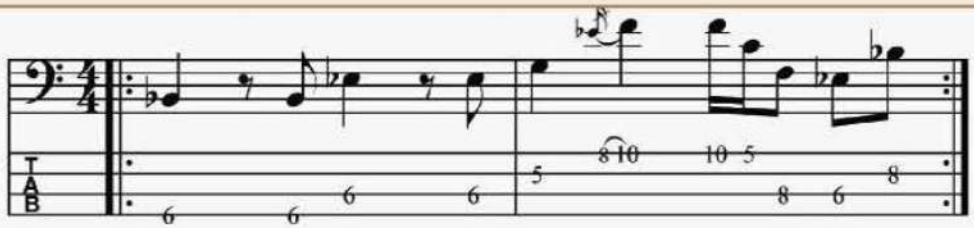
Ex 4: Sting me through my dreams

4/4 Time

When *Grey Day*, a lamentation of the woes of the working life heralded by a ringing alarm clock and punctuated by ominous bell chimes, was released as a single from the band's third album in 1981, it heralded a big change from the upbeat, bouncy ska attack of the first two albums, and the dark mood was a whole new departure for Madness. There's a dubby reggae vibe underpinning *Grey Day*, and Bedford deals with the demands of this particular song with consummate ease, delivering a real nugget of a bass part that we've tried to get you close to with our example.

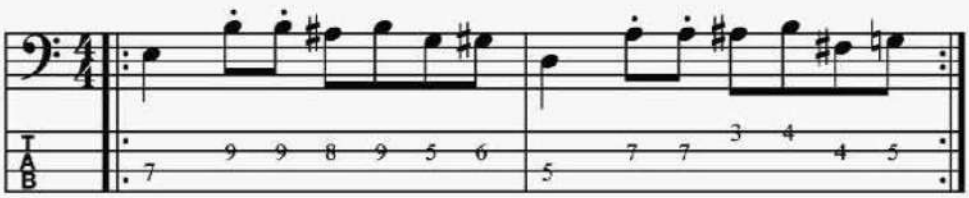
Ex 5: There's no hurry

4/4 Time

You won't find anything of a noticeably busy nature in any of Bedford's Madness grooves – and certainly no impressive flurries of 16th-notes – but there are still some pretty tricky patterns to deal with, especially given the speedy tempo at which many of the songs are played. Have a look at our fifth example, which is based on the main verse part from *Cardiac Arrest*. The song is about the death of a workaholic, and its disco-octave bass part moves from high to low position at a fairly brisk tempo. The key to nailing it is to keep your fretting hand nice and relaxed.

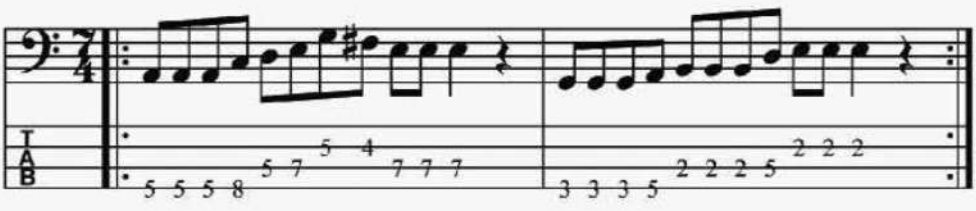
Ex 6: Kip on my sofa

4/4 Time

Mark Bedford's ability to make you stop and listen is often based on a cool, unexpected idea, such as the unique bass approach on *Baggy Trousers*. At other times he does it with a simple melodic hook, like the one found on Madness' version of the Labi Siffre classic *It Must Be Love*. *Bed And Breakfast Man* is another excellent example of his talent in standing out, and we've tried to get you close to the overall feel with the two bars above. On this jaunty pop number, Bedford delivers a verse part with solid root notes in bar one and a slippery Motown-influenced lick in bar two.

Ex 7: Welcome to the lion's den

4/4 Time

Even though they had a numerous hit singles, only one of the band's songs ever actually topped the chart (hey, there's still hope). At least *House Of Fun*, which told the coming-of-age story of a boy attempting to buy condoms in a chemist shop on his 16th birthday, reached number one in 1982. Bedford's bass part is a minor classic with its underlying dub feel and myriad of semi-tone licks, some of which we've approximated here. It's important to execute the semi-tones smoothly without hammering on – you'll probably find this a little awkward at the full original speed.

Ex 8: Make a hard day's work easy

7/4 Time

Take It Or Leave It, released in 1981, was a documentary film about Madness which the band co-funded with their record label of the time, Stiff Records. It's also the title of a song from the *Absolutely* set (1981) and it's unusual for Madness as it's in odd time – 7/4, to be precise. Bedford deals with it with aplomb, delivering a bassline that tracks Suggs' vocal without really heavily outlining the time signature. Have a look at our version: to nail it, you can either count your way through it or simply learn the melody. Whichever way you choose to go, make sure you have fun with it.

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THERE'S MORE TO GAIN!

THE DEFENDER

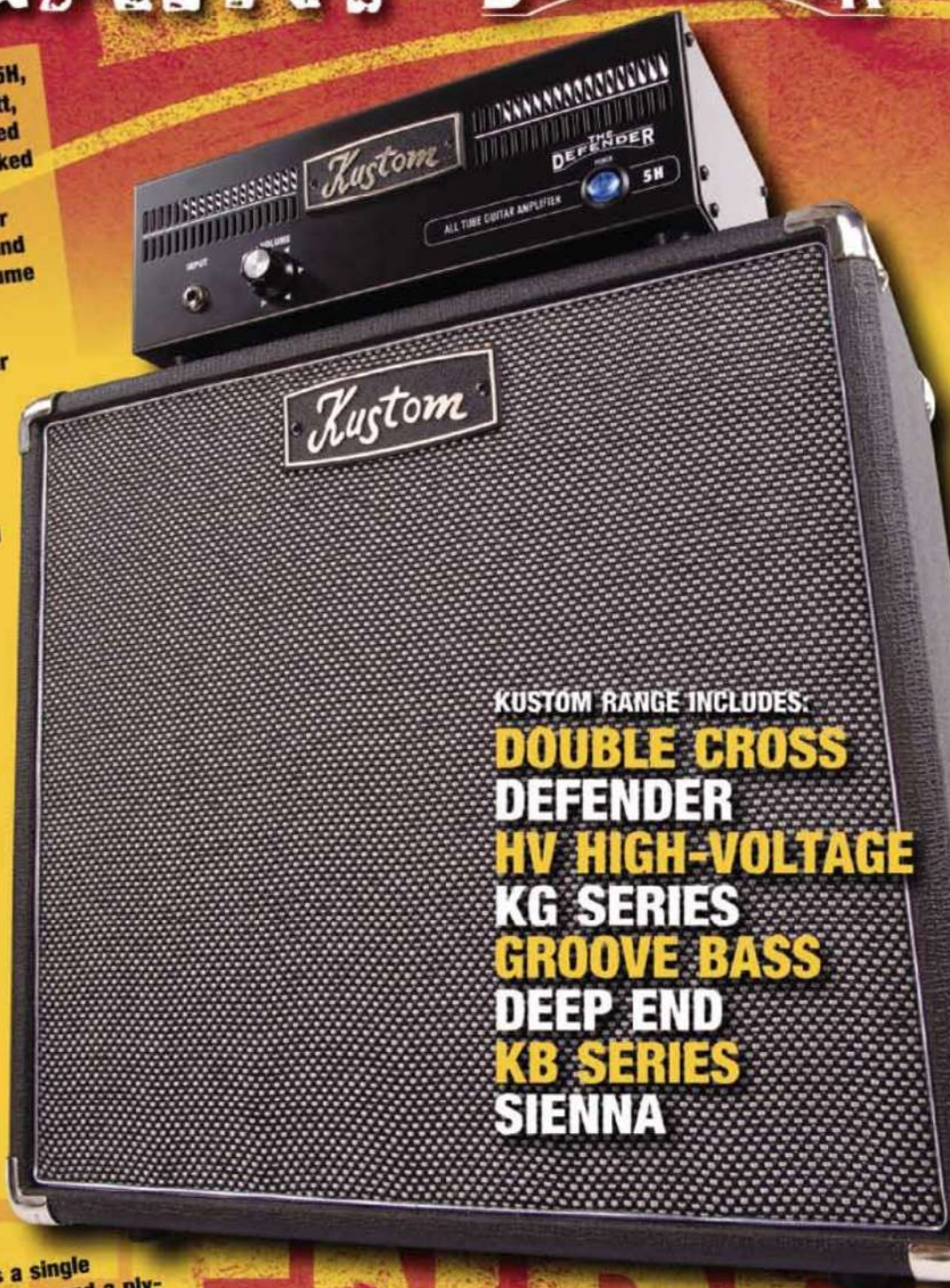
Enter the USA designed Defender 5H, Kustom Amplification's new 5-watt, all-tube guitar head. This pint-sized powerhouse generates true, cranked up tube amp tones at realistic volume levels that are perfect for recording sessions, rehearsals and even small gigs where high volume is frowned upon.

The new Defender 5-watt guitar head has only one knob – Volume! But the fun lies in hearing what this knob does as you turn it up. Starting at its lowest volume position and moving clockwise, you'll hear clean and clear tube tones that progressively give way to overdrive until this little sucker is simply screaming.

Features include one 12AX7 preamp valve, one EL84 power valve and three speaker outputs (4, 8, and 16-ohm). This lets players mix and match its use with a variety of speaker cabinets, providing even more flexibility.

The Defender 5H head is designed to work perfectly with the new Defender 1x12 Speaker Cabinet.

Solidly constructed the cabinet features a single Kustom 12-inch speaker and a ply-wood baffle board for enhanced tone and resonance. Rated at 30 watts RMS it produces rich, articulate clean tones and when overdriven, delivers gutsy, soul-stirring tones that will put a smile on your face!



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Back Stage

Did you know this month...

Feb 2007: As part of 'Harrods Rocks', the London shopping Mecca opens its doors for the Born To Rock exhibition. In honour of the electric guitar and its impact on popular music and culture the world-famous department store laid on a decadent show that showcased the instrument at the heart of rock'n'roll. Taking pride of place were impressive displays featuring Rory Gallagher's worn-to-the-grain Strat, Rickenbacker's 'Frying Pan' lap steel (the world's first production solid electric), four of the world's most valuable guitars, and priceless axes belonging to Hendrix, Van Morrison and Muddy Waters. The crowd-pleasing 'Rock Couture' section featured a line-up of snazzy guitars that had received provocative makeovers from fashionistas and musicians including Philippe Starck, Bono and Jennifer Lopez. Live music kept the ears busy too, with sizzling performances from bluesman Matt Schofield and an (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt at the world record for the most guitarists playing simultaneously. *Smoke On The Water* was the chosen cut, obviously.

Photo: Stephen Hird/Reuters/Corbis

24 February 1951: Fender manager Don Randall announces the Broadcaster is to be renamed the Telecaster. After the Broadcaster's initial release and following a full-page advert in *Musical Merchandise* magazine, Gretsch sent an infamous telegram to Fender claiming an infringement on their trademarked Broadkaster drum line. Accepting the claim, Fender removed 'Broadcaster' from the offending headstocks, leaving just 'Fender'. These guitars have since become known to collectors as No-Casters and were produced only until the clipped decals ran out. Randall himself eventually chose the Telecaster tag, echoing the age of TV, and by April that year Fender's renamed electric was released.

23 February 2010: Johnny Marr is overjoyed to have his stolen 1964 Gibson SG returned. Marr was horrified to discover his prized cherry red SG (worth an estimated £30,000) was missing following a gig at the Scala in King's Cross in 2000. It had been taken by a light-fingered Smiths 'fan' called Stephen White, who'd managed to get backstage. White was rumbled when he took the guitar to Denmark Street for repair after he'd accidentally stood on it. A police tip-off led to his arrest and the recovery of the precious Gibson from his North London home. White told a London court he'd seen the unguarded guitar and stolen it via the fire escape in a 'spur of the moment decision'. He went on to say he was 'disgusted' at his actions and was given 200 hours of community service. Marr chose not to take any further action.

Feb 1964: The Yardbirds sign with EMI's Columbia imprint, bagging a reported £25,000. With Eric Clapton now a fully-fledged member, the Yardbirds started their ascent to stardom by taking over from the Stones for a residency at the Crawdaddy Club in the spring of 1963. The Crawdaddy's big cheese Giorgio Gomelsky soon

became their manager and helped secure a deal with the label (interestingly, Decca deemed the Yardbirds 'unsuitable for teenagers' and again lost out, as they had with the Beatles). The first single, Billy Boy Arnold's *I Wish You Would*, fared well; the follow-up *Good Morning Little Schoolgirl* reached #44, and their third single *For Your Love* went gold, shifting over a million copies. Debut album *Five Live Yardbirds* was recorded at their Marquee Club show, and a tour with Sonny Boy Williamson soon followed.

17 February 2005: A Cooper Owen auction billed as the largest ever collection of Hendrix memorabilia takes place at the Hard Rock Cafe in London. The mammoth haul consisted of over 20,000 lots and included guitars, posters, clothing and signed records, most originally amassed by Bob Terry, a fan who'd struck up a friendship with the man. Highlight of the hoard was a '65 Strat that went for the sum of £100,000. Also included was a poem penned by Hendrix after the guitar-torching show at Monterey that sold for £10,000, and a signed copy of the Experience's debut single *Hey Joe* that fetched a tidy £2000.

Hendrix's 1965 Fender Strat

5 things better than a sneaky post-gig ciggie

Bringing a brand new guitar to a band rehearsal. It's always guaranteed to add some excitement to the proceedings, and can often inject the whole group with a new lease of life. Just try to choke back the scream when your bassist's headstock swivels within range

Using your old tobacco tin for plectrums. Ah, the happy memories. No more roll-ups, unfortunately - but you can get that sense of satisfaction every time you look for a well-worn old friend

Learning the difference between analogue and digital. Finally! No more four-track tape hiss, easy edits, and kit you can take anywhere. It took a while, but you were never really gonna buy that Otari 24-track machine, were you?

Selling a load of old equipment you don't use anymore. The wonders of eBay... now you have spare cash to buy some new gear you might actually use

Giving your first guitar to a young relative. A new set of strings and a bit of polish, and it can offer a new lifetime of entertainment. And hey, it's been under the bed for about 30 years

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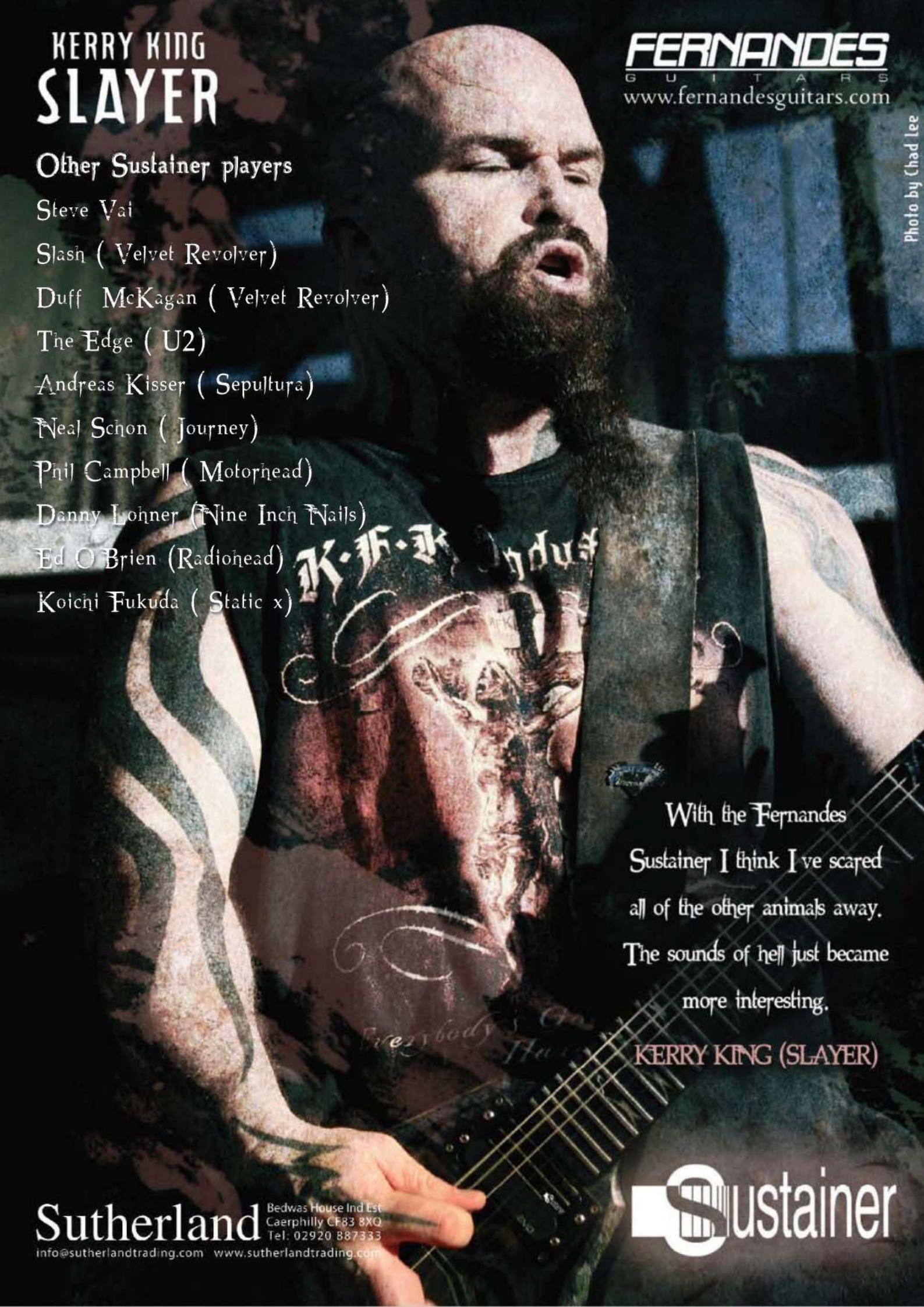
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Duff McKagan (Velvet Revolver)
The Edge (U2)
Andreas Kisser (Sepultura)
Neal Schon (Journey)
Phil Campbell (Motorhead)
Danny Lohner (Nine Inch Nails)
Ed O'Brien (Radiohead)
Koichi Fukuda (Static x)
With the Fernandes Sustainer I think I've scared all of the other animals away. The sounds of hell just became more interesting.
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